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DRAGON™

A Dungeons & Dragons® Roleplaying Game Supplement

DRAGON™

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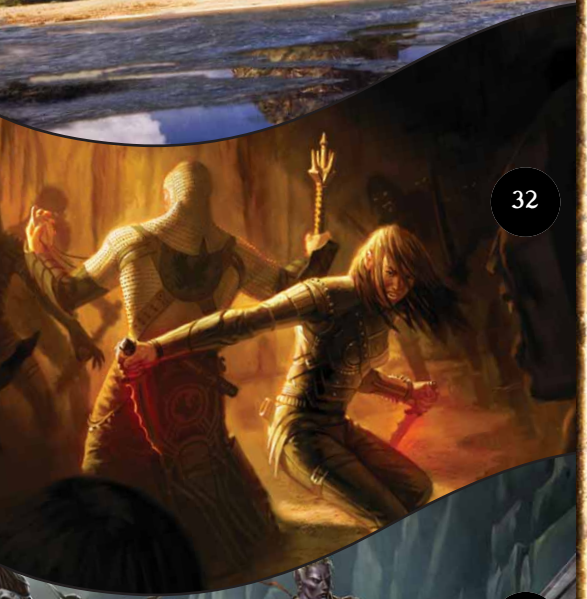

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DRAGON *January 2009*

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New Year's Resolve

I wanted to write this editorial, fresh into 2009, about my New Year's resolutions. I know this topic has been done to death. Magazine editors across the globe are likely writing similar editorials right now. But the idea was suggested by some co-workers, followed immediately by several suggestions for what my resolutions should be.

I feel like suggesting resolutions for someone else is a lot like making a critical commentary on their life. Okay, it's not a lot like that. It is *exactly* that. I started to take offense, then realized that this sort of insight isn't easily come by. After all, if you walked up to a friend on a normal day and said, "Hey, what's wrong with me? What could I work on?" They're likely to respond with sarcasm ("Everything.") or platitudes ("You're fine the way you are!" Thanks, mom.).

But ask a friend what your New Year's resolutions should be, and you'll get responses. Oh yes, you will. In fact, co-workers nearby will shout them over cube walls in an effort to get their 2 cents in. Apparently resolutions are a free-for-all way to offer "constructive" criticism. Once the suggestions started rolling in, I started to enjoy the experience, and started soliciting more. Here's a sampling from around the office when I started to ask people what they thought my New Year's resolution should be.

Sara Girard, D&D Associate Brand Manager: "When you DM, stop making up rules on the fly that negatively affect your players."

Translation: "Stop telling us when we're breaking the rules."

Shelly Mazzanoble, Confessions of a Full-Time Wizard Columnist: "Give your columnists more than three days notice that their column is due."

Let it go, Shelly. Let it go.

Steve Winter, Web Specialist: "Be nicer to your co-workers."

Uh, what are you trying to say, you big jerk?

Steve Schubert, RPG Developer: "Be a better fantasy football drafter."

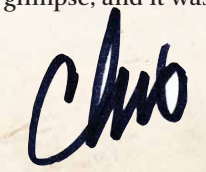
Touché, Shoe. Touché. But last I checked, we both had the league's worst record at a glorious 3-11. Pot, meet kettle.

Stephen Radney-MacFarland, Save My Game Columnist and RPG Developer: "Buy Stephen more drinks."

Done! Since sitting next to SRM in meetings is like sitting with the delinquent kids at the back of class, I imagine the hyjinks that will follow drinks with SRM could only be entertaining.

The Rouse, D&D Senior Brand Manager (and apparently all-around creepy dude): "Smile more. And wear this..." (as he reaches into a desk drawer).

I didn't stick around long enough to see what The Rouse was pulling out. I caught a glimpse, and it was leather and had buckles. Creepy.



Legacy of Acererak

by Robert J. Schwalb

illustrations by Eric Belisle, Raven Mimura

We entered that accursed tomb with the welcome of its foul attendants, each smiling and offering whispers of encouragement. Into the blackness strode five foolhardy adventurers and yet only I walked out alive. Darkness swallowed the first, when eager Rillian stepped boldly into the Devourer's maw. Khasta sprung a wicked trap and died when a dart fusillade filled her blood with wicked poison. Algrum stepped into a glowing portal and I can only presume he died, for the sounds of his screaming echoed all around us. And Phillip, poor Phillip, crumbled to dust when he looked into the skull's faceted eyes. I escaped with my body intact, but I can't say the same for my mind. The tomb's horrors haunt me still. Acererak, cursed lich, awaits my death and when I die, he'll steal my soul as he did those companions I left behind in that evil place. Know this: Seek not the Tomb of Acererak for there are easier ways to die.

Many dungeons fill the world, but few come close to the malice found in the Tomb of Horrors. The reputed resting place of the infamous necromancer, Acererak, the Tomb has tempted many heroes and fools alike into testing their mettle against the tricks and traps protecting the Tomb's fabled mithral vault. Nearly all have been found wanting. Regardless of how many descended into its labyrinthine corridors, fell victim to its innumerable hazards, or emerged, maimed or mad, the dungeon has survived, promising the same death and despair as it always has to the next band to enter its darkened corridors.

One might wonder why any dare descend into the Tomb's nightmarish depths if death is nearly certain. Treasure, of course. One cannot count the legends about the fabulous treasures in the tomb's bowels. One can seek out glory as well, because few can say they survived the Tomb, and fewer can claim they survived intact. Each new generation produces those who would follow in the steps of the fallen to seek their fates in the Tomb's unhallowed halls.

Adventurers and Acererak

Acererak casts a long shadow across the world, and his malign presence touches many people in places scattered across creation and beyond. From undead spawned by his dread rituals to the descendants of those adventurers who died in the tomb, Acererak and his legend have shaped and altered countless lives. Whether the infamous undead affects your character is up to you.

Backgrounds

The easiest way to connect your character to Acererak's legacy is to establish it in your character's background. First presented in *Player's Handbook 2*, backgrounds help ground characters in the campaign setting, offering possible origins, reasons for adventuring, and tips for roleplaying these characters. In addition, a background also provides a slight mechanical edge, such as a bonus to a skill, fluency in an extra language, or an extra skill to your list of class skills. Some backgrounds grant other benefits, such as the regional benefits described in the *Forgotten Realms® Player's Guide*.

A player character's destiny might be guided by the infamous demilich, a brush with undead, kinship to one of the Tomb of Horrors many victims, or loss or hardship brought about by one of the Acererak's servants. If you are interested in establishing a stronger link to this menace, any of the following new backgrounds should suffice. Many backgrounds include suggested skills, suggested languages, optional background benefits, or all of the above. Choose one of the following benefits from those listed:

- Add one of the suggested skills to your list of class skills.
- Gain a +2 bonus to checks made using one of the suggested skills.
- Gain fluency in one of the suggested languages.
- Gain the optional background benefit.

Accursed Lineage

Whispers about your family's lineage haunted your childhood. Claims of being cursed, doomed, or otherwise touched by evil made your early years difficult. These troubles sourced from tales about your family's history because it is believed you are a descendant of the infamous Acererak.

Possible Minor Quests: You might seek to clear your family's name, uncover the truth about your family's past, or follow in the steps of your dark ancestor.

Suggested Skills: History, Intimidate, Religion

Background Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to Diplomacy and Intimidate checks when interacting with undead creatures.

Adventurer's Scion

One or both of your parents were adventurers and you grew up listening to stories about their achievements, the monsters they defeated, and the fantastic places they explored. Although each tale was more harrowing than the last, they always came out victorious in the end, with one exception: the Tomb of Horrors. They never speak of it, except to say it was an evil place—dark like no other. The only survivors, they left many friends in that accursed dungeon and warned you against following in their steps.

Possible Minor Quests: You might seek out the fabled Tomb of Horrors to succeed where your parent or parents failed. You could search the dungeons or what lies beyond to rescue their lost comrades.

Suggested Skills: Arcana, History, Religion

Background Benefit: Whenever you make a monster knowledge check, you can reroll the check, but you must use the second result even if it's worse than the first.

Curious Archeologist

Dungeons, ruins, and old tombs house the secrets of the past, and dedicated scrutiny can reveal much of old civilizations and famous personages. So whenever an opportunity arises to examine a historical sight, you're loath to let it pass you by. While many dungeons capture your imagination, none of them has quite the same allure as does the Tomb of Horrors.

Possible Minor Quests: You might explore the corridors of Acererak's tomb, retrieve relics from the deep chambers, or seek lore about who Acererak was in life.

Suggested Skills: History, Perception, Thievery

Background Benefit: When engaging in a skill challenge to disable a trap, your first successful Thievery check grants you an extra success.

Lost Kin

When you were young, a beloved relative—a parent, sibling, or another family member—left with an adventuring company in search of glory, treasure, and adventure. From time to time, you received letters recounting their successes and near-failures, but eventually the letters stopped coming. The last letter was brief, saying only they were headed for Skull City somewhere in the Vast Swamp. After years of no communication, your family believed the relative met an end somewhere in that sinister place, but no one knows and the question of what really happened haunts you still.

Possible Minor Quests: Although searching for your lost kin might be the forefront of your concerns, you should be careful of what you seek. In all likelihood, your lost kin might be searching for you, but this person might not be the person you remember. You relative might have been driven mad, might seek to give you a cursed relic pulled from the dungeons she explored, or might even return as an undead monster. In any event, putting the memory of your

relative to rest, and perhaps the relative herself, might serve as a suitable minor quest.

Suggested Skills: Any class skill

Suggested Language: Any language other than Abyssal or Supernal

Background Benefit: You gain a +3 bonus to Nature checks made to recall useful information about geography.

Necromancer's Chattel

The Bleak Academy keeps a stable of living slaves to murder and animate as undead when they come of age. Life in servitude to these necromancers is understandably bleak. You, though, escaped your chains and survived the long flight through the Vast Swamp to reach civilized lands. Do you want vengeance? Will you fight to liberate the others held by the necromantic cabal?

Possible Minor Quests: You might have escaped, but your former captors are not likely to let you stay free. You might have to avoid their attempts to reclaim you, so you are always moving and staying one step ahead of them. Or you might go back, intent on freeing your fellows and razing the necromancers' city.

Suggested Skills: Endurance, Religion, Stealth

Background Benefit: You gain a +2 racial bonus to saving throws to end conditions and ongoing effects with the fear keyword.

Restless Dead

Undead horrors stalk the countryside in your homeland, preying on the living and staining the land with their evil presence. You grew up fighting these monsters, watching as your friends and kin fell at your side only to rise as zombies or worse. You escaped the nightmare of youth, but the experiences fill your nights with nightmares. Have you sworn to fight undead no matter the cost? Or are they so terrible that you cannot bear to face them?

Possible Minor Quests: Finding and destroying the origin of the undead creatures menacing your community might drive you to undertake a life of adventure. You might scour the countryside to find and destroy powerful agents until you find the true source of the burgeoning evil.

Suggested Skills: Insight, Perception, Religion

Background Benefit: You gain a +1 bonus to damage rolls against creatures with the undead keyword.

Touched by Darkness

You might have served a necromancer in your youth, perhaps as an apprentice or possibly as guard or servant. Proximity to your master's corruption left a mark on you. Did your experience alter how you see undead? Is necromancy a path you might seek or is

HEROIC TIER FEATS

Cleansing Challenge	**Cha 15, paladin, *divine challenge* class feature**	**Use *divine challenge* against undead creature and deal 2 radiant damage.**
Divine Boon	**Cleric, Channel Divinity: *divine fortune***	**+5 radiant damage to undead with *divine fortune*.**
Divine Purity	**Paladin, Channel Divinity: *divine mettle***	***Divine mettle* grants resist necrotic if saving throw ends a necrotic effect.**
Greater Turning	**Cleric, Channel Divinity: *turn undead***	**On a miss with *turn undead*, target is pushed Cha squares**
Purifying Light	**Cha 15, any divine class**	**+1 on attack rolls with radiant prayers against undead**
Radiant Touch	**Paladin, *lay on hands* class feature**	**Use *lay on hands* as an attack against undead targets**
Student of Moil	**Con 13, Int 13**	**+1 on damage rolls with cold or necrotic powers**

PARAGON TIER FEATS

Stunning Rebuke	**11th level, cleric, Channel Divinity: *turn undead* class feature**	***Turn undead* can daze instead of immobilize**
Radiant Hunter	**11th level, ranger, multiclass divine class**	***Hunter's quarry* damage is radiant**
Shadow Born Warlock	**11th level, Int 15, warlock, *shadow walk* class feature**	**Gain resist necrotic with concealment**
Undead Ward	**11th level, cleric, Channel Divinity: *turn undead* class feature**	***Turn undead* creates a zone**

HERITAGE FEATS

Ghost Touched	**Con 13, Int 13**	**+2 Religion; augment at-will powers**
Radiant Soul	**Cha 13**	**+2 Diplomacy; augment at-will powers**
Raven Queen Devotee	**Wis 13, Cha 13**	**+2 Intimidate; augment at-will power**
Shadow Soul	**Dex 13, Wis 13**	**+2 Stealth; augment at-will powers**
Undead Hunter	**Con 13, trained in Religion**	**+1 to healing surge value; augment at-will powers.**
Zombie Veteran	**Str 15**	**+2 Athletics to escape grabs; augment at-will power**

it an abomination to be fought and destroyed? How does the mark manifest on you? Are you pale? Do you suffer from a disfiguring condition, or are you unhinged?

Possible Minor Quests: You might have born witness to appalling acts of wickedness, and if so, you might seek redemption, fighting the darkness to atone for your past. You might also seek out the necromancer or undead master you served to prevent his works from plunging the world into death.

Suggested Skills: Intimidate, Stealth, Religion

Background Benefit: You gain a +1 bonus to saving throws against ongoing effects and conditions with the necrotic keyword.

FEATS

The new feats presented here provide characters committed to the fight against undead, necromancers, and anyone else who follows the steps of Acererak with new tools and techniques to succeed.

Heroic Tier Feats

Any feat in the following section is available to any character of any level who meets the prerequisites.

Cleansing Challenge

Prerequisites: Cha 15, paladin, *divine challenge* class feature

Benefit: When you use *divine challenge* to mark an undead creature, you also deal 2 radiant damage to that creature. At 11th level you deal 4 radiant damage, and at 21st level you deal 6 radiant damage.

Divine Boon

Prerequisites: Cleric, Channel Divinity: *divine fortune* class feature

Benefit: Whenever you hit an undead creature with an attack for which you gained a bonus from *divine fortune*, your attack deals an extra 5 radiant damage.

Divine Purity

Prerequisites: Paladin, Channel Divinity: *divine mettle* class feature

Benefit: If the target of your *divine mettle* power succeeds on a saving throw to end a condition or ongoing effect with the necrotic keyword, the target also gains resist necrotic equal to your Charisma modifier until the end of your next turn.

Greater Turning

Prerequisites: Cleric, Channel Divinity: *turn undead* class feature

Benefit: Whenever you miss a target when using *turn undead*, the target is pushed a number of squares equal to your Charisma modifier. The target takes no damage and is not immobilized.

Purifying Light

Prerequisites: Cha 15, any divine class

Benefit: Your radiant prayers gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls when used against undead targets. At 11th level, this bonus increases to +2. At 21st level, this bonus increases to +3.

Radiant Touch

Prerequisites: Paladin, *lay on hands* class feature

Benefit: You can use your innate healing power to blast undead with radiant energy, gaining the *radiant touch* power.

Radiant Touch — **Feat Power**

You transform your divine healing into radiant energy, damaging undead.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Implement, Radiant
Minor Action **Melee** touch
Target: One undead creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Reflex
Hit: You spend a healing surge but regain no hit points. The target creature takes radiant damage equal to your healing surge value.
Special: Use of this power counts toward your daily limit of uses of the *lay on hands* class feature.

Student of Moil

Prerequisites: Con 13, Int 13

Benefit: You gain a +1 feat bonus to damage rolls when you use a power that has the cold or necrotic keyword.

At 11th level, this bonus increases to +2. At 21st level, it increases to +3.

Paragon Tier Feats

Any feat in the following section is available to a character of 11th level or higher who meets the prerequisites.

Dazing Rebuke

Prerequisites: 11th level, cleric, Channel Divinity: *turn undead* class feature

Benefit: Whenever you hit an undead creature with your *turn undead* class feature, you can choose to make the target dazed instead of immobilized.

Radiant Hunter

Prerequisites: 11th level, ranger, multiclass divine class

Benefit: Whenever you would deal *hunter's quarry* damage against an enemy, you can choose to treat that damage as radiant damage.

Shadow Born Warlock

Prerequisites: 11th level, Int 15, warlock, *shadow walk* class feature

Benefit: Whenever you gain concealment from *shadow walk*, you also gain resist necrotic equal to your Intelligence modifier.

Undead Ward

Prerequisites: 11th level, cleric, Channel Divinity: *turn undead* class feature

Benefit: Your *turn undead* class feature gains the zone keyword. Whenever you use this power, the burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of your next turn. Any undead creature that enters or starts its turn within the zone takes 1d6 + Wisdom modifier radiant damage.

Heritage Feats

In addition to the normal feats presented here, a number of feats are denoted as heritage feats. These feats help you customize your at-will powers and other aspects of your character to help make your adventurer an individual by your historical connections to undead. If you choose multiple heritage feats (or feats that similarly modify at-will powers), you choose which feat modifies the power for the purposes of resolving the attack with the power.

Ghost Touched [Heritage]

Prerequisites: Con 13, Int 13

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to Religion checks.

In addition, you gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Holy Strike (paladin, PH 92): If your target is undead, one ally adjacent to you gains a bonus to its next damage roll against the target equal to your Wisdom modifier.

Magic Missile (wizard, PH 159): When using this spell against an undead enemy that is insubstantial, your attack ignores the insubstantial trait, dealing full damage instead of half damage.

Sacred Flame (cleric, PH 63): Whenever you use this prayer against an undead creature, you can choose to grant one ally resist necrotic equal to your Charisma modifier instead of granting temporary hit points or the ability to make a saving throw.

Radiant Soul [Heritage]

Prerequisite: Cha 13

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to Diplomacy checks.

In addition, you gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Bolstering Strike (paladin, PH 92): When you hit an undead creature using this prayer, you can also make a saving throw against any necrotic ongoing effects or conditions affecting you in lieu of gaining temporary hit points.

Hellish Rebuke (warlock, PH 132): When used against undead targets, *hellish rebuke* deals radiant damage instead of fire damage.

Righteous Brand (cleric, PH 63): If the target of your attack is undead, when you grant the ally the bonus to melee attack rolls against the target, that ally's next attack against the target deals extra radiant damage equal to your Charisma modifier.

Raven Queen Devotee [Heritage]

Prerequisites: Wis 13, Cha 13, you must worship the Raven Queen.

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to Intimidate checks.

In addition, you gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Enfeebling Strike (paladin, PH 92): If the target is undead, you can forgo bestowing the penalty to the target's attack rolls to have the target grant combat advantage to all enemies until the start of your next turn instead.

Priest's Shield (cleric, PH 63): Whenever you would grant an ally a +1 power bonus to AC, you can forgo this bonus to instead grant the ally resist necrotic equal to your Charisma modifier until the end of your next turn.

Shadow Soul [Heritage]

Prerequisites: Dex 13, Wis 13

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to Stealth checks.

In addition, you gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Lance of Faith (cleric, PH 63): If the target is undead, you can also push the target 1 square on a hit.

Valiant Strike (paladin, PH 92): If you hit an undead creature with this prayer and it is marked by you, you gain a +1 bonus to Will until the start of your next turn.

Undead Hunter [Heritage]

Prerequisites: Con 13, trained in Religion

Benefit: Increase your healing surge value by 1.

In addition, you gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Careful Attack (ranger, PH 105): If the target is undead, and you benefit from Prime Shot, your attack deals extra damage equal to your Strength or Dexterity modifier.

Commander's Strike (warlord, PH 145): If the target is undead, your ally gains a +2 bonus to the attack roll.

Holy Strike (paladin, PH 92): If the target is undead, your bonus to the damage roll is equal to your Wisdom modifier plus your Charisma modifier.

Reaping Strike (fighter, PH 77): When you use this exploit and miss, one undead enemy adjacent to you also takes damage equal to one-half your Strength modifier (or equal to your Strength modifier if you're wielding a two-handed weapon).

Zombie Veteran [Heritage]

Prerequisite: Str 15

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to Athletics checks made to escape a grab.

In addition, you gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Sure Strike (fighter, PH 77): If you roll a natural 15 or higher when using this exploit against an undead enemy, your attack deals extra damage equal to your Strength modifier.

Valiant Strike (paladin, PH 92): You gain a +1 bonus to your damage roll for each undead enemy adjacent to you.

Twin Strike (ranger, PH 105): If you're using this exploit against an undead creature and you are armed with two melee weapons, you deal extra damage equal to your Wisdom modifier if you hit with both attacks.

Wolf Pack Tactics (warlord, PH 145): If your target is undead and you hit, one ally adjacent to you can shift 1 square as a free action.

The Bleak Academy

An obscene cabal united by fell purpose and dread desire, the Bleak Academy has a large number of members who would follow in Acererak's steps. Gathering in Skull City and sprawling around the infamous Tomb of Horrors, the cabalists perform terrible rituals, engage in experiments, and raise all manner of undead monstrosities to glorify their exalted lord.

The Bleak Academy Lore

A character knows the following with a successful skill check.

Arcana DC 25: The Shadowfell bleeds into the mortal world where Skull City stands, but the influence is not the chilling pall normally associated with such regions. Instead a conduit to a region of Darklands is not far from the City That Waits (see *Manual of the Planes,* page 60). The Darklands' influence spills through the planar barriers, staining the mortal world with its corrupting influence, and thus Skull City and those who die here often rise as undead.

History DC 15: The Bleak Academy is a society of deviants and exiles committed to the study of necromancy. Driven from their lands for all sorts of crimes, they gather in Skull City because it is far from civilized lands and they can conduct their work and research without interference.

History DC 20: Founded several decades ago, the Bleak Academy united those with an interest in necromancy, the Shadowfell, and undead in general. Skull City, the city they founded, welcomes any with the same interest, sheltering them within the bone walls provided they swear oaths to the Devourer, the once-mortal mage of incomparable power also known as Acererak. The Academy chose the site for their institution and supporting community for its proximity to Acererak's blood-soaked Tomb of Horrors, because many believe the demilich's influence is strongest here.

Religion DC 20: For all their study, the Bleak Academy is very much a cult to the Devourer, deifying, rightly or wrongly, Acererak. The demilich, if indeed a god, is a poor master because he lends little power and reveals few secrets, so jealous is he of his vast knowledge.

Organization

The Bleak Academy has all the pretense of an intellectual society, and they approach their grim study with all the scholarly airs one would expect from the world's preeminent sages. The Academy trains apprentices, funds research, and accumulates the world's darkest lore on the subjects of death, undeath, and blackest magic.

Leader: Since its founding, Mistress Ferranifer guided the Bleak Academy to its present power. Enjoying a powerful connection to Acererak, she prides herself as being one of his greatest agents in the mortal world. Ferranifer is a vampire of considerable might, but in recent years, she has secluded herself in her crypt far below the Academy. Her lair is every bit as convoluted and deadly as the Tomb the Academy honors.

Headquarters: The Bleak Academy emerges from the side of the skull-like hill capping the Tomb of Horrors. The institution stands in front of the ancient entrance to the tomb proper. This massive, brooding structure is constructed from black stone and decorated with macabre images, profane inscriptions, and jarring sigils. A half ring of stone teeth fronts the place, and beyond, one can enter through a similarly sickening foyer and into the chambers beyond. Here, one finds workshops, classrooms, a large auditorium, private chambers, and more, all decorated in the same death motif.

Since the Bleak Academy regards adventurers as proper sacrifices to their master, they welcome outsiders and do not interfere as long as the visitors proceed directly to the Tomb of Horrors and do not stray from their descent. Of course, those adventurers who emerge intact from the Tomb are usually murdered, their corpses animated and added to the thralls wandering the city's gloomy streets.

In terms of terminology, "city" is perhaps too generous a word for the community surrounding the tomb. A sea of shops, hovels, and graveyards, all within the boundaries of a steep wall fashioned from the assembled bones of those killed in the tomb, the area is every bit as unsettling as the Academy. Undead shuffle alongside the living, skeletons and zombies serve as labor or guards, or perhaps for an unspeakable purpose. Although the cabalists permit adventurers into their demesne, not all residents of Skull City are so welcoming, and many would-be

explorers find an abrupt end to their adventure after tangling with one of the city's "fine" citizens.

Hierarchy: Managing the Bleak Academy falls to Ferranifer, but she cedes most of her power to the instructors who report to her. Each student is assigned to one instructor, who oversees his or her education. Students might study under any of the dozen or so professors, but their assigned mentor monitors their progress and disciplines them when needed. Discipline is often in the form of maiming, but death is sometimes a better lesson.

Members: The Bleak Academy welcomes anyone with an interest in the necromantic arts into their fold. Those who lack the resolve or talent to master the coursework find their failures bring them a new career as a zombie, and their twitching cadavers are then used for anatomy classes.

Bleak Academy members are drawn from the worst the world has to offer. Their corruption could reveal itself in bubbling tumors, disgusting habits, or obscene preoccupations. Deviance might also not be immediately apparent since it could lurk deep within personalities and then be revealed fully when the individual is overcome with anger, hate, or lust.

The rest of Skull City is made up of scum drawn from all corners of the world: cast-offs and misfits, freaks and soulless murderers. Gnolls walk alongside halfling cannibals, while assassins broker deals in shadowed taverns over mugs brimming with herb-infused blood, and ogres rip elves apart for sport. Skull City indulges every vice; no desire is too twisted or too strange to be forbidden here. Few outside the Academy have much talent in necromancy, and many are thieves, murderers, cannibals, and far worse. While not members, they are valued allies to the Academy and its designs.

Apostles of the Devourer

The Apostles are a motley mix of people from many cultures and lands. What binds them all is their fierce loyalty to Acererak and their obsession with death.

Apostles of the Devourer Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Religion check.

DC 10: The Apostles of the Devourer are practitioners of necromancy. It's whispered that they serve an undead god of terrible power and purpose, and their allegiance to him is bound by blood.

Devourer Initiate **Level 5 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 200

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +1
HP 46; **Bloodied** 23
AC 18; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 16
Speed 6

⊕ **Dagger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+12 vs. AC; 1d4 + 6 damage.

↛ **Decay** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 10; +10 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 6 necrotic damage, and the target grants combat advantage to all enemies (save ends).

✲ **Decay Burst** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Necrotic**
Area burst 1 within 10; +8 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 6 necrotic damage, and the target gains vulnerable 5 necrotic (save ends).

✧ **Evoke Terror** (minor; encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 1; +8 vs. Will; the target grants combat advantage to all enemies (save ends), and it immediately moves its speed by the safest route away from the bleak initiate.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Skills Arcana +11, Intimidate +8, Religion +11
Str 15 (+4) **Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 8 (+1)
Con 10 (+2) **Int** 19 (+6) **Cha** 12 (+3)
Equipment black robes, dagger, foul stench

Devourer Initiate Tactics

Not one to engage its enemies directly, the devourer initiate hangs back and hits its enemies with *decay burst*. While its allies keep the foes at bay, the initiate targets vulnerable enemies with *decay*. Should two or more foes converge, it uses *evoke terror* to send them fleeing.

Bleak Necromancer **Level 7 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 300

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +8
Grave Stench aura 1; enemies that enter or start their turns within the aura take a -2 penalty to attack rolls.
HP 80; **Bloodied** 40
AC 21; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 16
Resist 5 necrotic
Speed 6

⊕ **Lantern Staff** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic, Weapon**
+12 vs. AC; 1d8 +3 damage plus 1d6 fire and necrotic damage.

↛ **Death Bolt** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 5; +11 (+13 against bloodied targets) vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 8 necrotic damage and slide the target 2 squares.

✲ **Enervating Burst** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Area burst 1 within 10; +9 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 5 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

✲ **Restless Dead** (standard; sustain: minor; encounter) ✦ **Necrotic, Zone**
Area burst 1 within 10; flying creatures immune; +11 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of the bleak necromancer's turn. Any enemy that enters the zone or starts its turn within the zone is subject to another attack. The bleak necromancer can move the zone 3 squares by spending a standard action.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Skills Arcana +13, Intimidate +7, Religion +13
Str 11 (+3) **Dex** 16 (+6) **Wis** 11 (+3)
Con 16 (+6) **Int** 21 (+8) **Cha** 8 (+2)
Equipment black robes, lantern staff

Bleak Necromancer Tactics

The bleak necromancer uses *restless dead* during the first round to catch as many enemies as it can. It then flings *death bolts* at immobilized enemies. Should several foes break free from the zone, the necromancer uses *enervating burst* to keep them in place.

Disciple of the Devourer **Level 11 Elite Controller**
Medium natural humanoid (undead), human XP 1,200

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +5; darkvision
HP 228; **Bloodied** 114
AC 27; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 22
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 20 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Claws** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+16 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).

↛ **Sphere of the Devourer** (standard; sustain: minor; encounter) ✦ **Conjuration, Necrotic**
The disciple of the devourer conjures a black sphere in an unoccupied square within range and makes an attack against one adjacent creature: ranged 10; +15 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 5 necrotic damage, and the target slides 1 square. If this damage would reduce the target to 0 or fewer hit points, the target takes a -2 penalty to death saving throws until it takes a short rest. The *sphere* lasts until the end of the disciple's next turn. Any creature that starts its turn adjacent to the sphere takes 1d4 necrotic damage. The disciple can sustain the sphere until the end of its next turn by spending a minor action. It can also move the sphere 3 squares by spending a move action. Finally, it can make another attack with the sphere by spending a standard action.

✲ **Void Sphere** (standard; requires *sphere of the devourer*; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
Area burst 3 within 10, centered on the *sphere of the devourer*; +15 vs. Fortitude; pull target 1 square (toward sphere).

✧ **Putrescent Spray** (minor 1/turn; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Close blast 5; targets one creature in burst; +15 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 3 necrotic damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Skills Arcana +15, Bluff +11, Intimidate +11, Religion +15, Stealth +13
Str 14 (+7) **Dex** 17 (+8) **Wis** 11 (+5)
Con 18 (+9) **Int** 21 (+10) **Cha** 13 (+6)
Equipment black robes, orb

Disciple of the Devourer Tactics

The disciple of the devourer conjures its *sphere of the devourer* and sustains it each round, moving it when it's not directly threatened, and making an attack each round. Should any enemy come too close, the disciple uses *putrescent spray*.

Mistress Ferranifer

A powerful vampire lord and necromancer, Mistress Ferranifer rules Skull City and is the headmistress of the Bleak Academy.

Mistress Ferranifer Tactics

Ferranifer is cautious in combat; she prefers negotiation to confrontation. When pushed, though, she's vicious, hitting an obvious leader with *blackfire*. Finally, she uses *dominating gaze* against a defender for added protection. She compels her new thrall to lock down its allies, while she attends to any remaining enemies.

Encounter Groups

The Apostles of the Devourer congregate in Skull City, but they can be found beyond it as well. Many necromancers leave the city in search of ritual ingredients, forbidden magic items, artifacts, lost lore, and more. Many also spread out to recruit new students, searching for those with even a passing interest since even the ones who lack the discipline can serve.

Level 6 Encounter (1,232 XP)

- 1 bleak necromancer (level 7 controller)
- 2 devourer initiates (level 5 artillery)
- 14 zombie rotters (level 3 minion)

Mistress Ferranifer **Level 18 Elite Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, vampire XP 4,000

Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +18; darkvision
HP 336; **Bloodied** 168
Regeneration 10 (regeneration does not function while Ferranifer is exposed to direct sunlight)
AC 34; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 33
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 15 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8, fly 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+23 vs. AC; 2d6 + 6 necrotic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

⊛ **Foul Dart** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force, Necrotic**
Ranged 10; +22 vs. Reflex; Mistress Ferranifer makes two attacks against two different targets; 2d6 + 7 force and necrotic damage per attack.

✧ **Blackfire** (minor; encounter) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
Ranged 10; +22 vs. Reflex; on a hit, the target loses 1 healing surge and gains the "engulfed in midnight flames" condition (save ends). While engulfed, any creature that starts its turn in a space adjacent to the target takes 5 cold and 5 necrotic damage. *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target gains the "engulfed in midnight flames" condition (save ends) and cannot spend healing surges until it takes a short rest. *Second Failed Saving Throw:* The target gains the "engulfed in midnight flames" condition (save ends) and cannot spend healing surges until it takes an extended rest.

⸸ **Blood Drain** (standard; requires combat advantage; recharges when an adjacent creature becomes bloodied) ✦ **Healing**
+20 vs. Fortitude; 2d12 + 6 damage, and the target is weakened (save ends), and Mistress Ferranifer regains 84 hit points.

✧ **Dominating Gaze** (minor; recharge @6) ✦ **Charm**
Ranged 5; +22 vs. Will; the target is dominated (save ends, with a -2 penalty to the saving throw). Ferranifer can dominate one creature at a time.

Mist Form (standard; encounter) ✦ **Polymorph**
Ferranifer becomes insubstantial and gains a fly speed of 12, but she cannot make attacks. She can remain in *mist form* for up to 1 hour or end the effect as a minor action.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Skills Arcana +17, Acrobatics +20, Athletics +14, Bluff +21, Intimidate +21, Religion +17, Stealth +20
Str 11 (+9) **Dex** 22 (+15) **Wis** 19 (+13)
Con 16 (+12) **Int** 17 (+12) **Cha** 24 (+16)
Equipment black cloak

Level 12 Encounter (3,500 XP)
- 1 disciple of the devourer (level 11 elite controller)
- 1 battle wight commander (level 12 soldier [leader])
- 2 battle wights (level 9 soldier)
- 4 horde ghouls (level 13 minion)

DEVOURER'S SPAWN

Horrid necromantic leavings infused with dread energy, Devourer's spawn are wretched things, driven by an insatiable hunger for living flesh.

Devourer's Spawn Lore

A character knows the following with a successful Religion check.

DC 18: Devourer's spawn are bits of organ, tissue, and rotten flesh collected and awakened into a bestial awareness. They endure terrible agony from the conflicted memories from when they lived, but mostly from the wrongness of their present form.

DC 23: Spawn grow and evolve by adding organs and blood that they rip and drink from still-living victims. In time, the loosed bits coalesce into a vaguely humanoid-shaped bag of blood and meat known as a festering morass. The creature's membrane is thin, so those who strike it with melee attacks are at risk of becoming splashed.

Glistening Heap **Level 11 Brute**
Medium natural animate (blind, swarm, undead) XP 600
Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +9; blindsight 10
Flailing Viscera aura 1; each enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 5 necrotic damage.
HP 138; **Bloodied** 69
AC 22; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 23
Immune disease, gaze, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic, half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant, 5 against close and area attacks
Speed 4
⊕ **Rotting Ropes** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+12 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 3 necrotic damage, and ongoing 10 necrotic damage.
↯ **Sickening Expulsion** (no action; when reduced to 0 hit points) ✦ **Necrotic**
Close burst 1; +10 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 7 necrotic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to all attack rolls (save ends).
Slithering Mass (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)
The glistening heap shifts 1 square.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Skills Stealth +11
Str 21 (+10) **Dex** 13 (+6) **Wis** 18 (+9)
Con 18 (+9) **Int** 1 (+0) **Cha** 4 (+2)

Glistening Heap Tactics

When it senses a creature, the glistening heap gathers itself up and oozes across the floor, where its foes catch a whiff of its unique odor. It sends up ropy masses of glistening flesh and coagulated blood to rip its enemies apart.

Festering Morass **Level 13 Elite Brute**
Large natural animate (blind, undead) XP 1,600
Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +10; blindsight 10
Appalling Stench aura 10; living creatures that enter or start their turns within the aura take a -2 penalty to all defenses.
HP 330; **Bloodied** 165
AC 26; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 26
Immune disease, gaze, poison; **Resist** 10 acid, 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 5
Action Points 1
⊕ **Splattering Slam** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Melee 2; +14 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 1 damage and ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends), and each creature adjacent to the target takes 5 necrotic damage.
↯ **Necrotic Leakage** (immediate reaction, when hit by a melee or ranged attack; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Close blast 3; +12 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 6 necrotic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).
↯ **Necrotic Rupture** (free action; when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Necrotic**
Close burst 2; the burst creates a zone of necrotic mist. All creatures entering or starting their turns inside the zone take 10 necrotic damage. The zone moves with the festering morass and persists until the festering morass takes no damage from the end of one turn until the beginning of its next turn.
Alignment Evil **Languages** –
Str 23 (+12) **Dex** 14 (+8) **Wis** 19 (+10)
Con 25 (+13) **Int** 4 (+3) **Cha** 4 (+3)

Festering Morass Tactics

The undead horror wades into battle, unmindful of its enemy's attacks. It slams any foe it can reach, splattering vile necrotic droplets on those too close together. Should the festering morass be damaged by a melee

or ranged attack, it sprays fluids, and when bloodied, it fountains the stuff.

Shadow Sentinels

Constructs fashioned from warped spirits and fused with shadowstuff, these mute sentries stand guard over the hidden roads to the City That Waits.

Shadow Sentinel Lore

A character knows the following with a successful Religion check.

DC 18: Those sacrificed in Acererak's name find no peace in death because the Devourer is aptly named. Consumed by the powerful lich, their essence reformed and twisted into new shapes, they serve the dark one for eternity.

Shadow Watcher **Level 14 Lurker**
Tiny shadow animate (undead) XP 1,000

Initiative +17 **Senses** Perception +16; darkvision
Gloaming aura 2; bright light in the aura is instead dim light, and dim light in the aura is dark.
HP 104; **Bloodied** 52
AC 29; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 25
Resist 15 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Speed 4, fly 6 (hover), overland flight 8

⊕ **Shadow Talons** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Reach 0; +17 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 6 necrotic damage, and the target gains vulnerable 10 necrotic (save ends).

Combat Advantage ✦ **Necrotic**
The shadow watcher's shadow talons attack deals 2d6 extra necrotic damage to targets it has combat advantage against.

↓ **Shadow Plunge** (standard; recharges when it hits with *shadow talons*) ✦ **Necrotic**
The shadow watcher flies 6 squares and makes an attack at any point during that movement: targets creatures with vulnerable necrotic; +17 vs. Fortitude; on a hit, the shadow watcher enters the target's space without provoking an opportunity attack and perches on the target's shoulder. The target is dominated and takes ongoing 15 necrotic damage (save ends both). While the target is dominated, the shadow watcher gains insubstantial, but cannot take standard, move, or minor actions (see also *invisible at rest*). *Aftereffect:* The shadow watcher exits the creature's space into any unoccupied adjacent space.

Invisible at Rest (free, when the shadow watcher does not move on its turn; at-will) ✦ **Illusion**
The shadow watcher becomes invisible until the start of its next turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** –
Skills Stealth +18
Str 9 (+6) **Dex** 23 (+13) **Wis** 19 (+11)
Con 14 (+9) **Int** 8 (+6) **Cha** 14 (+9)

Shadow Watcher Tactics

A shadow watcher monitors movement invisibly. When a trespasser approaches, it wings forward to slash with its shadow talons. While its foe deals with its newfound vulnerability, the shadow watcher plunges into the target and seizes its mind.

Shadowguard **Level 17 Soldier**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead) XP 1,600

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +18; darkvision
Devourer's Presence (**Cold**) aura 1; enemies that start their turns inside the shadowguard's aura are slowed until the start of their next turns.
HP 165; **Bloodied** 82
AC 32; **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 29
Resist 15 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Speed 7

⊕ **Shadowblade** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
+22 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 7 necrotic damage plus 1d8 cold damage, and the target is marked until the end of the shadowguard's next turn.

↓ **Shadow Doom** (immediate reaction, when a creature the shadowguard marks moves or shifts; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
+22 vs. Will; the target slides 1 square, and gains vulnerable 5 cold and vulnerable 5 necrotic (save ends both).

⇙ **Vision of Darkness** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Fear**
Close blast 5; the shadowguard can exclude squares containing a marked target from this blast; +20 vs. Will; the target is pushed 3 squares and is immobilized until the end of the shadowguard's next turn. *Miss:* The target is pushed 3 squares.

Isolation's Horror ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
The shadowguard's shadowblade attack deals 5 extra cold and necrotic damage against targets it has marked and that have no allies adjacent to them.

Alignment Evil **Languages** understands Common
Skills Perception +18, Stealth +16
Str 24 (+15) **Dex** 16 (+11) **Wis** 21 (+13)
Con 21 (+13) **Int** 11 (+8) **Cha** 14 (+10)

Shadowguard Tactics

The shadowguards are terrifying opponents who isolate their opponents and punish them when they try to escape.

The City That Waits

Rising from a darkened sea in a far-flung corner of the Shadowfell is the City That Waits, or Moil. It is whispered that within this ancient city, somewhere in the tangle of crumbling bridges and slender towers lays the route to Acererak's hidden redoubt. To explore this accursed place is even more dangerous than the Tomb of Horrors, for though the City awaits a rebirth promised in another age, its slumber is anything but peaceful.

The City That Waits Lore

A character knows the following with a successful History check.

DC 13: Places exist in the Shadowfell where no mortal is meant to tread. These fonts of wickedness have a darkness so profound that setting foot in these realms sees the soul pulled from the body and the flesh seized by ravenous spirits hungry for the warmth of the living. Terrible places all, the City That Waits is among the worst. According to legend, it slowly sinks in an ocean of darkness, its towers rimed with necrotic ice and infested by the damned.

DC 20: Ages ago, there stood a city named Moil, in a place or world long forgotten. Inhabited by cruel and selfish people, they indulged their wickedness in wanton acts of evil. Such was their iniquity that they even turned to the demon princes for the power they offered. Of those cults dedicated to the abyssal powers, those sworn to Orcus had the greatest influence, and in time they stamped out all other rival sects and cults until they were masters in their unwholesome city.

For all their selfish cruelty, excess sickened the Moilians, and little by little, Orcus's hold weakened as they searched for a more wholesome power to find redemption for their evil ways. No matter their efforts or improved intentions, the demon prince's grip was too tight and when the people refused to make sacrifices in his name, his anger was unleashed. It took form in a terrible curse, causing the Moilians to fall into a deep sleep. As they slept, Orcus seized the city and flung it into the deepest regions of the Shadowfell, where it was believed that they would succumb to the fell energy there and serve him more loyally in undeath.

DC 25: As expected, the Moilians died out and awoke as free-willed undead, drifting aimlessly through their now frozen city. Orcus never reclaimed Moil because his attentions were drawn elsewhere with dire upheavals in the Abyss. So the Moilians waited for the return of the master who forsook them,

The widespread corruption and undiluted shadow power made the City That Waits an attractive prize for many dark lords and fell agencies, but it was Acererak who thwarted his rivals and claimed the city for himself. Using ready labor, the undead host constructed his Fortress of Conclusion somewhere even deeper in the Shadowfell, where no light shines at all, and only death dwells. Tethering the great citadel to the City That Waits, Acererak ensured he could still influence the mortal world and thus hatch his sinister plans.

So Moil waits still, the last tattered remnants of the ancient people shuffling about as their city decays around them and new forces lay claim to the sinking towers and the spinning minarets that, on occasion, break free to tumble into the void overhead. It is a place of chill, horror, and danger, but, rumor suggests, it is also a place where great magic lies in wait to be reclaimed by those with the courage to seize it.

Moilian Dead

Orcus laid a heavy curse on the Moilians—a curse they must bear still.

Moilian Dead	**Level 16 Lurker**
Medium shadow humanoid (cold, undead)	XP 1,400
Initiative +14	**Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
Frost (Cold) aura 5; living creatures that start their turns within the aura take 5 cold damage and grant the Moilian dead combat advantage until the start of their next turns.	
HP 128; **Bloodied** 64; see also *stirrings of unlife*	
Regeneration 10 (if the Moilian dead takes fire or radiant damage, regeneration does not function until the end of its next turn)	
AC 29; **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 28	
Resist 15 cold, 15 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 fire, 10 radiant	
Speed 5	
ⓘ **Slam** (standard; at-will)	
+21 vs. AC; 2d10 + 6 damage.	
⇙ **Stirrings of Unlife** (immediate reaction, when a living creature moves to within 5 squares of the Moilian dead; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**	
Close burst 5; living creatures only; +17 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 7 necrotic damage. If Moilian dead is currently prone, as a free action it stands and makes a charge attack against the nearest enemy.	
Crawling Death (standard; at-will)	
The Moilian dead falls prone and gains a +4 bonus to AC and all defenses until the start of its next turn or until it makes an attack.	
Combat Advantage ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**	
A Moilian dead's slam attacks deal 2d6 extra cold and necrotic damage to targets it has combat advantage against.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Common
Str 24 (+15)	**Dex** 15 (+10)	**Wis** 20 (+13)
Con 26 (+16)	**Int** 7 (+6)	**Cha** 6 (+6)

Moilian Dead Tactics

The Moilian dead takes no actions until a living creature comes within 5 squares, at which point it uses *stirrings of unlife* to rise up and charge the nearest enemy. It tries to stay close to its enemies lest Orcus's curse reasserts itself.

Moilian Dead Lore

A character knows the following with a successful Religion check.

DC 20: Moilian dead are the undead remains of those who lived in the City That Waits.

DC 25: When a living creature comes near a Moilian dead, it drains the foe's life force and awakens, leaching heat from the area as it smashes those enemies numbed by its aura.

DC 30: The Moilians all carry Orcus's curse, so if left alone, they collapse to resemble the corpses they should be.

Blackfire Creeper

Chosen guardians created from exemplary Moilian dead, the blackfire creepers patrol the City That Waits to dispatch any interlopers they find.

Blackfire Creeper **Level 19 Elite Soldier**
Medium shadow humanoid (cold, undead) XP 4,800
Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +18; darkvision
HP 368; **Bloodied** 184
AC 37; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 35, **Will** 29
Resist 20 cold, 20 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant; see also *imperiled by fire*
Saving Throws +2
Speed 5
Action Points 1

⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
+26 vs. AC; 1d6 + 7 damage plus 2d6 cold and necrotic damage, and the target is marked until the end of the blackfire creeper's next turn.

⨽ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
The blackfire creeper makes two claw attacks.

⨽ **Blackfire Touch** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
+24 vs. Reflex; on a hit, the target loses 1 healing surge and is engulfed in black flames (save ends). While engulfed, any creature that starts its turn in a space adjacent to the target takes 10 cold and necrotic damage. *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is engulfed in black flames and cannot spend healing surges until it takes a short rest. *Second Failed Saving Throw:* The target is engulfed in black flames and cannot spend healing surges until it takes an extended rest.

⇜ **Leached Life** (minor 1/turn; while bloodied; recharges when the *leached life* attack roll misses) ✦ **Healing, Necrotic**
Close burst 3; targets 1 creature in burst; +24 vs. Fortitude; the target loses 1 healing surge and the blackfire creeper regains 74 hit points.

Imperiled by Fire
If the blackfire creeper takes fire damage, it takes a -4 penalty to AC until the end of its next turn.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Str 17 (+12) **Dex** 25 (+16) **Wis** 19 (+13)
Con 24 (+16) **Int** 10 (+9) **Cha** 12 (+10)

Blackfire Creeper Tactics

The blackfire creeper rushes into battle, ripping through an enemy so it can use *blackfire touch*. It then charges another foe, and attacks with its claws until *blackfire touch* recharges.

Blackfire Creeper Lore

A character knows the following with a successful Religion check.

DC 14: Blackfire creepers are advanced undead remade by Acererak the Devourer. They are creatures of cold and unfathomable malice.

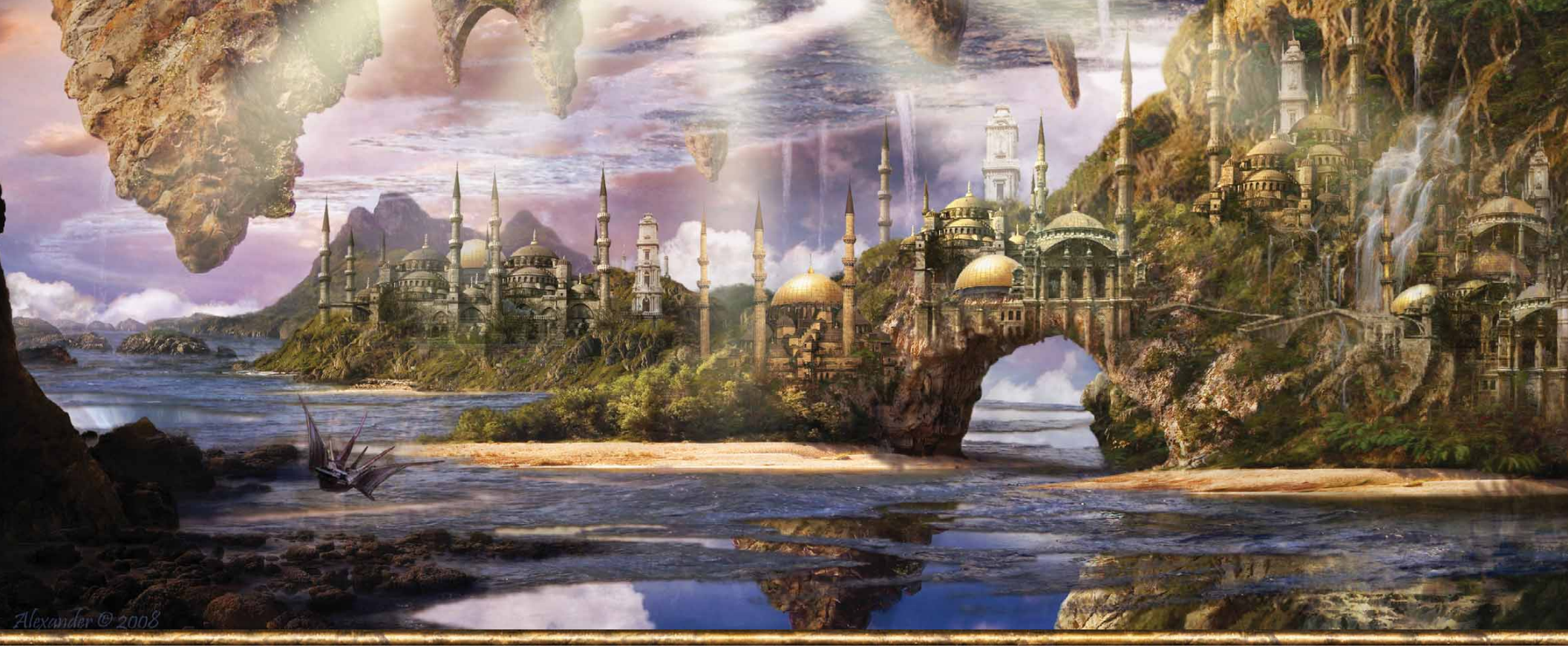
DC 22: The black fiery corona around their heads presages the blackfire creeper's direst attack. Transferring the flames to its enemy, it cackles as the cold fire burns the flesh as well as the soul.

DC 27: The ice coating the blackfire creeper's body is vulnerable to attack and if an enemy uses fire against it, the creeper is more likely to succumb to attacks.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb contributed design to such books as the *Forgotten Realms® Player's Guide, Draconomicon™ I: Chromatic Dragons, Manual of the Planes®, P2: Demon Queen's Enclave™, Martial Power™, Player's Handbook 2, Eberron® Campaign Guide, Eberron Player's Guide, Divine Power™, Adventurer's Vault™ 2, Draconomicon 2: Metallic Dragons, Primal Power™,* as well as numerous articles for *D&D Insider™*. Robert lives in Tennessee.

Rob would like to dedicate this article to the memory of Gary Gygax for "first planting the seed of Acererak in my imagination." He'd also like to thank Bruce Cordell for "making that seed grow and for writing the nastiest adventure I've ever had the pleasure to run."



Hestavar: The Bright City

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland

illustrations by Rob Alexander, Ryan Barger, & Jim Nelson

When the people of the world describe paradise, more often than not they're imagining visions of Hestavar. At first glance this astral city is an urban paradise, as if brought forth by the furtive imagination of those who idealize the virtues of civilization. Angels and astral skiffs drift among golden clouds, and floating islands hover over a vast island-studded lagoon of sparkling blue water. The islands, both those set in water and the ones set in air, are adorned with graceful and tapering alabaster edifices that melt into the stone with architectural perfection. Their balcony gardens and covered porticos serve as galleries where magnificent scenes abound, and they provide the occasional perches to colorful songbirds that flutter all about and to great avian steeds. The air is like a light and refreshing perfume, alive with the ringing sounds of bells, chimes, and harps. Yes, the city is gorgeous . . . prosaic . . . seemingly flawless.

And it might be the closest thing in the universe to perfect, but just like the proverbial apple, worms writhe within it. As the hub of trade in the Astral Sea, the city has graft and corruption seeping into it with each trade partner who opens shop on the lagoon's shores or atop the mercantile earthmote of Methion. A more noticeable spot of corruption lies on the windward side of the lagoon—here the Salts blow and spit, serving as a fitting testimonial for the primordial Heur-Ket, who was defeated here during the war between gods and primordials.

And then we have the exalted. Those damned noble exalted. Haughty, arrogant, and with no fear of death, they can be as vicious as any demon and more conniving than any devil, but they have the patience of angels.

–Barthew Vreen, Captain of the Spelljammer Wyrmrazor

Although the bustling City of Brass might be the largest metropolis in the universe, many consider that the cosmopolitan heaven of Hestavar is the most beautiful, richest, and civilized. This light-drenched oasis can feel familiar and downright cozy in contrast to the weird void of the Astral Sea that surrounds it. Its grand architecture and gem-paved streets shine brightly upon the stone settings of its lagoon's islands and earthmotes. Its gardens and parks are both lush and manicured, retaining their verdant beauty without a hint of the overgrown chaos indicative of the Feywild. Its people are cultured, civilized, and known for their passion for philosophy, craft, and the arts.

Many consider the dominion of both Erathis and Ioun to be the ultimate center of learning and industry in the universe.

However, the description above is not what normally attracts adventurers to Hestavar. Instead, one of the reasons they flock to this peaceful city among the clouds is because of its status as the best trading center in the Astral Sea.

The sun literally never sets here; as a result, commerce never knows when to sleep, and thus it doesn't. And while it lacks the vast, smoking forges and smithy factories of the City of Brass, Hestavar has its share of brilliant armorers and weaponsmiths who craft graceful and lithe weapons of quality—free of slave labor, its crafters quickly point out. Also, more than the efreet city, Hestavar serves as a center of magic item creation and innovation, and many consider the dominion of both Erathis and Ioun to be the ultimate center of learning and industry in the universe. From the halls of Kerith-Ald, the greatest academic minds of the planes ponder the mysteries of the universe. While much of their contemplation is theoretical in nature, their activity is connected to the various guilds, craft halls, and artisans of Methion by way of a complicated web of patronage by the rich and powerful exalted trading houses of Hestavar. The orb arcane implement, the discipline of alchemy, the water clock, the homunculus, and even the mighty spelljammer all originated in the city, or grew out of other arcane innovations created by the relationship (and fierce competition) of academic, patron, and artisan in the city.

So, while the ability to buy, sell, and trade treasures and information can drive adventurers to Hestavar, and the game of arcane innovation might keep the artificer or the crafting wizard in the city for even longer, some find that the Bright City is more than a beautiful supply stop. Many who explore the strange frontier of the Astral Sea utilize the city as a base of operations. It serves as a respite from the vast alien and mostly lifeless environs outside it, plus it is second only to the City of Doors in the number of conduits and means of transport to other parts of the universe. Additionally, some who sail the planes by planar dromond or spelljammer find Hestavar useful as a haven. And, if all of the above isn't enough to entice adventurers to visit at least once, three civilized deities make it their domain, which can attract the faithful or those seeking a favor from the three. Finally, Hestavar is a nexus of healing and restoration magic that can be won easily through deed or bought at a reasonable price. Even the most successful adventurers might need restorative assistance from time to time.

Hestavar

The most cosmopolitan and accessible of the astral dominions, Hestavar is a fantastically wealthy city of wonders.

Population: Approximately 300,000. Exalted souls and angels make up most of the population, with a smaller number of devas and mortals.

Government: The deities Erathis and Pelor rule over Hestavar in name, but they leave the actual administration of the city to an efficient bureaucracy headed up by the high minister, an angel named Kemuel.

Defense: Several legions of angels of battle, angels of valor, and exalted warriors.

Inns: House in the Clouds; Methion Arms; Garden of Geras. The Methion Arms is an excellent choice for travelers who desire a good mix of location, privacy, and reasonable rates.

Taverns: Silver Tankard; Andarman's Taproom; Kossian Vineyard.

Temples: Cathedral of Aurosion (Erathis, Pelor, and Ioun); University Chapel in Kerith-Ald (Erathis, Pelor, and Ioun). The palaces of Aurosion and Kerith-Ald include great halls of reverence, attended by angels and exalted clerics who served Erathis, Pelor, and Ioun in life. Smaller shrines dedicated to most other gods in the pantheon (even a few dark ones) exist elsewhere in the city, since the people of Hestavar are pious and give respect to all the deities.

Origins of the Bright City

Necessity is the mother of collaboration.
–An ancient Erathisian mantra

Even the most ambitious historians of Kerith-Ald—Ioun's own bastion of learning in the Bright City—do not believe anyone can compile a concise or complete history of the epochs of war between the gods and primordials. The time period involved is so expansive that it boggles the mortal mind. Eventually, even the most earnest and disciplined scholars might find it difficult and belittling to comprehend that one's life is just the blink of an eye to a deity or a primordial. But what is known and well documented by the scribes and seers of Kerith-Ald, which is also called the Swan Tower, is that in an early and violent period of that war, a powerful, blustering primordial named Heur-Ket invaded the Astral Sea and caused great havoc with his advance. As he pushed deeper into the Astral Sea, deities perished and their dominions were blown asunder. With each victory Heur-Ket grew stronger, bolder, and more arrogant in his belief that the deities and their servants should be punished for their interference with the First Work.

A trio of deities who held domains in relatively close proximity of each other knew that they would eventually become the target of Heur-Ket's wrath. These three gods—Pelor, Erathis, and Ioun—each controlled domains that were peaceful paradises. And though each commanded his or her own legion of angels, none of their domains were particularly well suited for war or even an extended siege. Pelor's domain, a field of sun-drenched planes dotted with farms and gardens, had no walls or parapets. Erathis held a city atop a large earthmote, and villas and workshops cluttered its surface. Traditionally its streets were open, because trade and innovation thrive among an open society. Ioun's dominion was a large scrying pool in the form of a vast and sparkling lagoon surrounded by white sandy beaches; her domain's only real defense was its mistress's ability to divine its approaching doom.

For mutual defense, Erathis, Ioun, and Pelor not only decided to pool their forces, but also combine their dominions. Fusing the features of all three of their former domains together, the trio waited and planned for the primordial's attack. They didn't have to wait long. Tales of their alliance reached Heur-Ket, and it enraged the primordial. Hastily he moved to attack the dominion, forgoing any form of reconnaissance or tactics. He would destroy these upstarts like he destroyed their kin, with the swift brutal force of the Elemental Chaos.

Some say the battle for Hestavar lasted a century, but scholars of the Swan Tower believe that might describe the entirety of Heur-Ket's campaign into the Astral Sea. In the end, the combined might of Pelor, Erathis, and Ioun defeated the primordial, but not without cost. To this day a section of Hestavar's paradise is marred by Heur-Ket's legacy. A swirling mass of wind and occasional destructive bouts of thunder and lightning churn at (and create) the windward end of the dominion, marking the Salts neighborhood of the dominion. Some still suggest that the trio of deities didn't destroy Heur-Ket, but merely bound him to the spot in the domains, like the gods bound countless primordials elsewhere in the universe. This accusation is officially and vehemently denied by the angel Kemuel, who serves as the voice of Hestavar's rule and high minister of the city's angelic bureaucracy.

The Defenders of Hestavar

The Bright City is guarded by legions of angels who are servants to the city's three deities: Erathis, Ioun, and Pelor. The angelic captains of Hestavar command flights of angels of valor and are supported by angels of valor and the occasional angel of vengeance in times of dire need.

Furthermore, the exalted of all three deities serve in the city's defense force. The most famous of these are the Bright Guard, a force of Pelor's exalted almost 5,000 strong. They fight as fearlessly as any angel, confident in Pelor's grace and their ability to return to fight again under the Sun Lord's just banner. The Bright Guard also serves as Hestavar's police force, patrolling all but the inner islands of the Salts.

Angelic Captain of Hestavar **Level 22 Soldier (Leader)**
Large immortal humanoid (angel) XP 4,150
Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +15
Angelic Presence Attacks against the angel of battle take a –2 penalty unless the angel is bloodied.
HP 206; **Bloodied** 103
AC 38; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 34
Immune fear; **Resist** 15 lightning, 15 radiant, 15 thunder
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover)
⊕ **Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +29 vs. AC; 2d12 + 6 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the angelic captain's next turn.
⚕ **Halting Sword of Woe** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon**
Reach 2; +29 vs. AC; 2d12 + 6 radiant damage and the target is marked, immobilized, and takes ongoing 10 radiant damage (save ends all).
⚔ **Perfection of the Blade** (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Weapon**
Close burst 2; +25 vs. Reflex; 2d12 + 6 damage and the target is marked until the end of the angelic captain's next turn.
Ruination of the Marked
Allies do 5 extra radiant damage when they hit a creature marked by an angelic captain of Hestavar.
Many from One (immediate reaction when an angel minion ally within 5 squares is reduced to zero of fewer hit points; encounter)
Four angel minions of the same type rise from the remains of the triggering angelic minion. These new minions appear in the square in which the triggering minion fell, or an unoccupied square adjacent to that square. These new minions act on the same initiative count as the angel minion that triggered the use of this power.
Alignment Any **Languages** Common, Supernal
Skills Diplomacy +24, Intimidate +24
Str 26 (+19) **Dex** 20 (+16) **Wis** 19 (+15)
Con 22 (+17) **Int** 17 (+14) **Cha** 27 (+19)
Equipment fullblade

Angelic Captain of Hestavar's Tactics

The angelic captain wades into battle with its troops, supporting the death-dealing potential of angels of valor or other minion allies with various marking powers compounded by its *ruination of the marked* ability. When the first minion falls, it typically calls forth reinforcements with its *many from one* power.

Exalted Bright Guard **Level 20 Brute**
Medium immortal humanoid (exalted), human XP 2,800
Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +16
HP 210; **Bloodied** 105; see also *divine light*.
AC 33; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 32; see also *divine light*.
Resist 10 fire, 10 radiant
Speed 6
⊕ **Tratnyr** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+23 vs. AC; 3d8 + 8 damage.
⊛ **Returning Tratnyr** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 10/20; +23 vs. AC; 3d8 + 8 damage, and the target is knocked prone. After the attack, the tratnyr returns to the exalted guard's hand.
⚕ **Bright Guard Smite** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Radiant, Thunder, Weapon**
Close burst 2; +21 vs. Fortitude; 3d8 + 8 thunder and radiant damage, and the target is deafened and blinded until the end of the exalted guard's next turn.
Charge of Summer's Wrath ✦ **Fire, Radiant**
When an exalted guard hits a target with a melee basic attack at the end of a charge, it does 1d10 fire damage, and ongoing 10 radiant damage (save ends)
Divine Light (minor action when the exalted soldier is bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
The exalted guard regains 50 hit points, and gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the end of the exalted guard's next turn.
Alignment Any **Languages** Common, Supernal
Skills Athletics +21, Intimidate +19
Str 22 (+16) **Dex** 21 (+15) **Wis** 23 (+16)
Con 24 (+17) **Int** 17 (+13) **Cha** 19 (+14)
Equipment chainmail, shield, tratnyr (*Adventurer's Vault*, page 10)

Exalted Bright Guard's Tactics

Armed with the versatile tratnyr, the exalted Bright Guard is equally adept at ranged and close combat. Fast and powerful, they prefer to charge a foe and let loose with *bright guard smite*, and then charge to their next foe, throwing their tratnyrs first if they can't make the distance in the charge.

Souls of the Bright City

Although my allegiance is, and will always be, with my Dread Master in Nessus, I do consider myself an honorary citizen of Hestavar, and that makes me feel . . . well . . . good.
–A frequent remark spoken by Naberius Sain, the Nine Hells' ambassador to Hestavar, often with a wry smile

The Bright City is greater than even the grandest metropolis of the world. This improved urban reality feels like a dream of civilized perfection. Those setting eyes on the city see opulent wealth displayed not only on nearly every surface of the cityscape, but also on the people who populate the city.

Foremost among the souls of the Bright City are its founders: Erathis, Pelor, and Ioun. These three gods forged a trio of ill-defended divine dominions into a near perfect city. Though the true masters of their domain–their combined divine power shaped it out of pure astral and maintains its general morphology and physical laws–they take little interest in everyday governance of the city. Although Erathis and Pelor, called the King and Queen of Light by their devoted subjects, appear at official functions and are the face of the city, they leave the minutia of rule to their angelic bureaucracy, which is led by its chief minister Kemuel. Ioun is almost entirely absent from government, since she prefers to pursue knowledge in the Swan Tower or roam the universe in the search of esoteric proofs of the obscure metaphysics theorized by the academics of Kerith-Ald.

Although the deity rulers of Hestavar stay largely in the background, their servants are everywhere. If one counts the legions that host a number of well-defended outposts that lie outside the dominion, those who patrol the sections of the Astral Sea nearby, and the bands that do their leader's bidding in points that stretch throughout the universe and even beyond, angels are the largest population block of the

city. The angels of Hestavar are always on the march or consumed with a task. They see civilization and society as the fruits of their labors for others to enjoy, not as activities in which to take part. Such activities are for the exalted, devas, and the mortals that dwell in the city.

Gods and angels aside, the most numerous and arguably the most important people in Hestavar are the exalted souls. When a mortal dies and its soul travels on to the Shadowfell, a small number of the elect—those souls chosen by one deity or another to serve them in the afterlife—become exalted. Beings with an appearance similar to that they had in life (though maybe a more perfect, younger form and with the wisdom of age and experience), the exalted are both rewarded and expected to serve their deity in the afterlife—in a way that takes advantage of their natural talents and accumulated knowledge.

Many thousand exalted souls of Pelor, Ioun, and Erathis dwell in Hestavar, each serving their deities or the city in large ways and small. These exalted align themselves in houses. From these houses, these exalted "families" pursue their personal and their deity's goals. Houses of Pelor exalted oversee agriculture interests on the dozens of farm islands and earthmotes of Hestavar or populate the defensive and policing forces of the dominion. The families of Erathis exalted involve themselves in the Game of Making or work within the angelic bureaucracy. Many houses of Ioun exalted work within the Swan Towers or serve the angelic bureaucracy.

These houses are not true family in most cases. An exalted house can have members of most civilized races all serving the same goal. Even some of the exceptional members of the more savage races are within these families from time to time since deities judge souls, not the flesh. However, it's rare, though not impossible, for large numbers of people from the same mortal family to become exalted in the same dominion. For example, at least one house, House Incenan, is ruled by a quartet of dwarf sisters. Regardless of the relationships exalted had before coming to Hestavar, though, relationships once they arrive and exist in the city for a while can be as strong or even stronger than kin; the bonds within the families are strengthened by centuries of cooperation and achieving the house's ends.

Death has little hold over some kinships, so one could consider exalted souls to be close to true immortals. When the exalted of Hestavar perish, they are reborn a week and a day later within the Aurosion (in the cases of exalted of Pelor or Erathis) or in the Hall of Enlightenment at the base of Kerith-Ald (in the case of exalted of Ioun). Some exceptions to this process exist, however; if an exalted's death occurred in pursuit of goals counter to a deity's wishes or creed, the exalted might truly die.

The rest of Hestavar's population is made up of transient or transplanted mortals or other peoples of the Astral Sea. Foremost of these groups are devas. Similar in some ways to exalted, these reborn souls are thrust out into the far corners of the universe; they find their way to the Bright City at some point in their lives, especially those who worship one of the Bright City's three patrons. Many stay for a period of time, since it is the closest place to home for these typically wandering loners, which means that the Bright City is one of the largest concentrations of devas in the universes. A school of angelic philosophers in the Swan Tower theorize that devas are the souls of angels thrown to the world during Heur-Ket's assault on the Astral Seas, but Ioun has warned that such a simple theory does not seem to fit the complex and subtle nature of these reborn beings.

Angelic, deva, and exalted souls might be the largest groups of people in Hestavar, but not everyone in the city is so spiritually pure. As the cosmic center of both knowledge and innovation, not to mention a bastion of unimaginable wealth, Hestavar has many trading partners and people interested in an alliance with the city. Almost every intelligent race can be found within the city, and embassies from every dominion of the Astral Sea, various Feywild enclaves, a scattering of Shadowfell bastions, and even a handful of powerful nations and city states from the world are among its islands and motes. All these embassies come with large staffs of representatives to treat with the angelic bureaucracy and exalted families, and they also trade knowledge with the sages of the Swan Tower. They even trade and negotiate with their rivals on peaceful, neutral ground. These embassies not only represent their leader's interests, but also the interests of independent traders, artisans, and even adventurers. Second only to Hestavar's exalted houses, the various embassies are the chief patrons for adventuring parties within, and for expeditions outside, the city.

Exalted Threats

Although Hestavar is a civilized city of light and a bastion of peace, conflicts still occur. Hestavar's exalted community is well known for its haughty disregard for the desires of others—one has a much different attitude toward conflict resolution when there is no real fear of death. They are used to getting what they want, and they don't suffer anyone they consider to be a fool. The longer someone stays in the city, the more likely the person will come into conflict with an exalted family.

The following is a typical small but organized exalted threat—a gallant and his spellslinging sidekick.

Exalted Gallant **Level 25 Elite Lurker**
Medium immortal humanoid (exalted), human XP 14,000

Initiative +24 **Senses** Perception +19
HP 356; **Bloodied** 178
AC 41; **Fortitude** 37, **Reflex** 39, **Will** 38; see also *cloak tangle*
Resist 15 poison, 15 radiant
Speed 8, climb 8; see also *blink step*

Rapier and Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+30 vs. AC; 3d8 + 7 damage, and the exalted gallant makes a secondary attack. *Secondary Attack:* +28 vs. Reflex; 3d4 + 7 and slide 1 square.

Pinning Blades (standard; requires combat advantage; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+28 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 damage and the target takes ongoing 10 damage, is immobilized, and grants combat advantage to all creatures (save ends all).

Dazing Dagger (minor/1 round; requires combat advantage; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+28 vs. Reflex; 1d4 + 7 and the target is dazed until the end of the exalted gallant's next turn.

Blink Step (minor action; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Teleportation**
The exalted gallant gains teleport 5 until the end of its next turn.

Cloak Tangle (immediate interrupt, when hit with a melee attack that targets AC or Reflex; at-will)
The exalted gallant gains a +4 bonus to AC and Reflex until the end of its next turn. Additionally the exalted gallant can shift 2 squares and the creature that made the attack that triggered this power grants combat advantage to the exalted gallant until the end of its next turn.

Alignment Any **Languages** Common, Supernal
Skills Acrobatics +25, Athletics +24, Streetwise + 23
Str 25 (+19) **Dex** 27 (+20) **Wis** 24 (+19)
Con 22 (+18) **Int** 16 (+15) **Cha** 22 (+18)
Equipment leather armor, duelist's cloak, parrying dagger, rapier

Exalted Gallant Tactics

An exalted gallant is a master of the hit-and-run swordplay forms favored by the exalted of Hestavar. He starts his assault with a rapier and dagger strike, followed by a *dazing dagger*. He pins those who grant him combat advantage, and he deflects attacks with his *cloak tangle*. He uses his combat control and maneuverability to keep enemies on the run, calling on his *blink step* to outflank his opponent when need be.

Exalted Brightmage **Level 26 Elite Artillery**
Medium immortal humanoid (exalted), eladrin XP 18,000

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +26
HP 370; **Bloodied** 185
AC 40; **Fortitude** 37, **Reflex** 40, **Will** 39; see also *improved fey step*
Resist 15 psychic, 15 radiant
Speed 8, fly 4 (hover); see also *improved fey step*

Forceful Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force, Weapon**
+33 vs. AC; 4d4 + 10 force damage, and push the target 1 square.

Mindbright Bolt (standard; at-will) ⊠ **Psychic, Radiant**
Ranged 20; +31 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 10 psychic damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 radiant damage and the target takes a -2 penalty to AC and Will (save ends both).

Mindfire (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅ ⚅) ⊠ **Psychic, Radiant**
Ranged 20; +31 vs. Will; 6d6 + 10 psychic and radiant damage, and the target is dazed and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls, skill checks, and ability checks (save ends).

Mind Scramble (minor; at-will) ⊠ **Charm, Psychic**
Close blast 5; +31 vs. Will; targets one enemy; 2d6 + 10 psychic damage, slide the target 3 squares, and the exalted brightmage is invisible to the target (save ends).

Improved Fey Step (move action; encounter) ⊠ **Teleportation**
Teleport 10 squares. When the exalted brightmage uses improved fey step, it gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the end of its next turn.

Alignment Any **Languages** Common, Elven, Supernal
Skills Arcana +31, Bluff +25, History +24, Insight +26
Str 20 (+18) **Dex** 22 (+19) **Wis** 26 (+21)
Con 23 (+19) **Int** 28 (+22) **Cha** 24 (+20)
Equipment robes, dagger, orb

Exalted Gallant Tactics

The brightmage is most dangerous when she works in concert with at least one other ally. From a distance she showers her enemies with an arcane assault. She uses her *mind scramble* to shut down one threat, and she uses her other attacks to minimize the threat of others. When the exalted brightmage is in dire trouble, she uses her *improved fey step* to bound away, and then she renews her attack from a distance.

Navigating the City

Here's the simplest way to get there—go windward through the Garden of Nesoulis and cross over the Specter's Bridge. Beyond the market is the Lion's Gate. That will take you to the Seven Angels' Mote. Follow the path past the leeward rise, and jump off the cliff next to the fountain. Don't worry, there's a soft drop there, and you'll land right in the middle of Gildward. I do it all the time.

See, it's simple.

—The "simplest" route from the Painted Garden to Gildward.

To mortals used to more terrestrial cities, Hestavar can be a confusing place to navigate. Even the strange architecture and alien physics of the City of Doors can seem natural and straightforward compared to the Bright City's complicated networks of isles and earthmotes.

Modes of Travel

Due to its unique geography, a number of modes of travel are available—and necessary—in the Bright City.

Boats, as small as gondolas, and as large a caravels, navigate Hestavar's lagoon and mooring in any one of a thousand piers that stretch out from both islands and white-sand shores. One of the most recognizable ships seen in the lagoon is the ubiquitous planar dromonds—large trading ships from throughout the seas of the known universe that traverse planar waterways by using a planes-hopping focus called a *runekeel*. These ships are the workforce of trade between the city and the world's ports. For centuries, confused oceanic mariners who claimed that they've sailed the Astral Sea and described it as a sparkling blue paradise filled with islands and sunshine were describing the only port of call they ever set eyes on in the Astral Sea—Hestavar's lagoon.

High above the lagoon, the famous painted birds of Hestavar share the skyways with a variety of larger, sometimes even monstrous, **flying creatures**. Griffons, hippogriffs, wyverns, riding drakes, and even the occasional metallic dragon fly from one earthmote to another; their riders aggressively competing for prime perching space with speed, cutthroat cunning, and coin. Some of the best perching places during festival days, or during the rare public appearance of Pelor and Erathis, can go for an astral diamond or more.

For those of more modest means, **astral skiff** pilots wait at appointed or well-traveled spots until they have a large enough group for a trip to another mote. These services can take up to an hour to accumulate enough passages for a trip, and it costs about three platinum pieces per passenger.

Those unable or unwilling to pay the coin for an astral skiff have other options to travel to even the far-flung sections of the city. A number of magic gates, bridges, and areas known as *soft drops*—areas connecting a higher and lower earthmote with an enchantment similar to the wizard's *feather fall* spell—are scattered throughout the city, making a number of routes from one place in the city to another. Many of the natives of Hestavar insist that you can reach any earthmote or island in the city by foot as long as one has the right knowledge, plus enough time and patience for extremely circuitous routes. As a matter of pride in these strange passages, you never hear a citizen of Hestavar utter the phrase, "you can't get there from here."

Directions

Whether one travels by boat, by flying beast, or by foot, a traveler eventually comes into contact with the city's directional jargon. In a city where the illumination constantly rains down from the upper cloud cover, direction is reckoned by the landmarks of the dominion. The people of Hestavar reconnoiter their city by the directions windward, leeward, waterward, and lightward.

The **windward** side of the dominion sits toward the swirling Eye of Storm—the remains of the primordial Heur-Ket—and the Salts neighborhood that is within it. **Leeward** is, of course the opposite direction, toward the calmer (and richer) end of the lagoon, with its cardinal being the neighborhood of Seven Pearl Shoal.

The city is navigated vertically with the directions **waterward** and **lightward**. For the most part, the gravity of the dominion often works as one would anticipate: lightward is usually up and waterward is usually down. However, a few anomalous earthmotes and islands on the windward side of the Bright City feature strange gravitational features. Often these indicate damage to the city done during the battle with Heur-Ket, but sometimes they are changes purposely perpetrated by exalted houses for reason both novel and industrious. Such anomalies are prevalent enough that the waterward and lightward directions are more useful than up or down.

Lightward is accompanied by a relative distance. Low lightward is of a lower altitude than high or highest lightward. Such references to altitude are often pointless when describing waterward, unless the starting point is lightward, or when describing one of a number of trendy taverns, feasthalls, and expensive villas that sit underwater in or around the Painted Reef.

Time

Another dimension of travel has its own rules in the Bright City—the dimension of time. With a steady and unblinking sunlight coming from the uppermost clouds of the dominion, there is no night in Hestavar. Instead, the city measures time by way of a number of water clocks situated on the hundreds of earthmotes that feature endless springs, and by the large one atop the tallest tower of Whitebell Bastion in the lagoon.

Time in the Bright City is split into three 6-hour cycles called belling (short for bell-length, since each cycle is announced by a cacophony of ring bells), and each is named after one of the three deities that calls Hestavar home. As a matter of reverence and custom, the city tends to rest and meditate during Ioun's belling, but the city never really sleeps, and it only slows slightly during this belling. These bellings are further split into two hands, and each hand is split into 3 hours.

Neighborhoods and Locales

We are a city united by the wisdom of three deities. We are a city divided by geography.
—A common Hestavar saying

Literally thousands of neighborhoods and districts are in Hestavar. Nearly every lagoon island and every floating mote features its own neighborhood, with large ones piling into neighboring cays or smaller satellites. Although many of these sections feature the estates, workshops, warehouses, and other bastions of everyday exalted and mortal enclave activity, many are of little interest to adventurers or even the everyday traveler. The following is a brief overview of some of those other sections that adventurers and visitors find themselves visiting through necessity or sometimes calamity.

Waterward Neighborhoods and Locales

Some say that in Hestavar wealth and power are like cream—it floats to the top. That's just a clever way of saying that the waterward neighborhoods are poorer and filled with less important personages in

the grand scheme of the city. Although not always true, the waterward neighborhoods lack the ostentatious wealth of the gold-trimmed and gem-studded streets of the upper mote wards, but compared to the cities of the world, many of them are still wondrously wealthy beyond the imagination. Visitor, adventurers, and traders from other parts of the universe make their home among the islands and the beaches of the waterward neighborhoods.

Hundred Bridges

This central district of the lagoon might also be the most important. Dominated by over two dozen large cays that encircle the Whitebell Bastion and scores of smaller ones interspersed between them, Hundred Bridges is the agriculture and trade center of the waterward city. Named for the numerous and colorful bridges that connect these islands, Hundred Bridges is home to the large and productive rice fields of the lagoon and the people who work them. It also supports a number of docks that service the planar dromonds that trade with the city. For adventurers, it is often the first stop upon entering the city by one of these plane-jumping sailing vessels. Because of that, and because of the numerous sailors that come ashore here, many gondolas offer transportation to Redcliffs and the Salts.

Painted Reef

Within the borders of a roughly egg-shaped ring of islands, just windward of the Shining Cove, lies a garden of colorful coral that serves as the habitat of some of the most vibrant and luminescent fish from all over the known universe. Though the islands feature homes and estates of Pelorite exalted who oversee the work at the nearby rice fields of Hundred Bridges, the real draw of this area are the numerous restaurants and feasthalls that sit below the surface, each a marvel of Erathis invention, and each featuring large areas of magically reinforced glass to give the appearance that the establishments are under water. Popular with even the important house masters of the lightward motes, these establishments are used frequently to finalize business deals and impress the mote-weary outsider trade partners.

Redcliffs

Second only to the Salts, the neighborhood of Redcliffs is home to the largest concentration of the city's transient population. In this neighborhood, a jumble of piers and connecting walkways climb a sandstone cliff. According to local legend, the cliff turned red with the blood of angels during Heur-Ket's assault on the city. Many of the homes and structures of Redcliffs are dug into the stones, creating areas of rare darkness in the Bright City. For those who see a bit of darkness necessary for their sanity, but don't care about keeping away from the scrutiny of angels (or taking advantage of business and services that thrive outside their scrutiny), Redcliffs is a home away from home. Filled with taverns, inns, and other establishments that cater to the homesick, the neighborhood is also called the outsider ghetto by moteward exalted.

The Salts

Nearly a dozen inhabited islands are underneath the wind- and rain-soaked umbrella of the Eye of Storm, and the people of the Hestavar call those islands the Salts. Named for the salt water the Eye of Storm spits about, this place is the closest thing Hestavar has to a slum. The primordial's essence creates a field that no angel can enter (and some say no deity can enter, which is another claim prime minister Kemuel denies), and it is home to seedy taverns, feasthalls,

and other dens of sin, not to mention the embassy of the Nine Hells. With the exception of their leader, the gregarious and charming succubus Naberius Sain, who often mingles with members of the angelic bureaucracy and dines in the estates of exalted houses, the devils assigned to this post find the Salts the most hospitable spot in the city.

While the rain-drenched and gale-battered structures of the Salts are thought to hide cults to primordials (especially those who work toward the return of Heur-Ket), enigmas of Vecna, and those who gain power from the strange beings that haunt the Far Realms, for the most part everyday life in the Salts involves nothing so nefarious. The businessfolk of the place, such as those running the famous Silver Tankard, are more interested in providing lodging and entertainment for travelers to the city, who might find the days of constant sun, and a city filled with exalted and angels disconcerting, stressful, and even downright uncomfortable.

Whitebell Bastion

Located at the near center of the lagoon, its towers pointing up toward the lofty heights of the Aurosion, Whitebell Bastion serves as the single largest internal garrison of angels in the city. A central edifice that reaches more than a thousand feet into the air is encircled by three smaller towers (each one a mere 100 feet tall). All four structures are connected at various places by fortified bridgeworks where angels look down upon their city to watch for dangers that only rarely manifest.

Atop the center tower is a large bell made from the purest of platinum—the Whitebell. The bell is magically attuned to the various water clocks of the city, and it rings in a deep and rich baritone with each belling. It is said that its ring echoes through the towers of the bastion with such force that it can kill mortals trespassing within it.

Lightward Neighborhoods and Locales

The higher one travels lightward in Hestavar, the more spectacular the sights become, and the more powerful the creatures one encounters.

Aurosion

There is one word for the palace of Aurosion—breathtaking. The envy of noble lords and petty tyrants of the world and beyond, this golden palace is the seat of Hestavar's power, the home of two of its three deities, and the meeting place for its angelic bureaucracy. Guarded by a legion of angels on the grounds, and constantly watched from below by the legions of Whitebell Bastion, Aurosion is the most secure spot in Hestavar, and maybe the entire universe.

Although the exalted of both Pelor and Erathis are reborn in the Awakened Hall after suffering a violent death, few exalted, not to mention mortals in the city, are ever granted the privilege of entering the deeper halls and chambers of Aurosion. Fewer still are bestowed with the city's greatest honor: to appear before Pelor and Erathis, the King and Queen of Light.

The Fields of Ida

The widest and flattest earthmote in the city, the Fields of Ida stands at the leeward end of the city, not far from, but far below, Ioun's Swan Tower. Not a single permanent building stands on the mote. Instead, the place is a flat field of green, dotted with daisies and the occasional flower garden or hedge maze. Hestavar's largest park, it is a place where lovers stroll, duelists compete for honor or sport, and the great festivals of the city are held.

Gildward

Home to the richest exalted families, and their most opulent displays of wealth, the Gildward is sometimes called "Thieves Paradise." Its streets resemble a mithral dragon's horde, and each home would be the envy of even the richest worldly emperor. But this paradise hides dangers for would-be thieves; its estates are guarded by the best security that money can buy—in the form of traps, guards, and guardian monsters. Some of these defenses are so ingenious and deadly that they could give demilich Acererak pause.

Kerith-Ald, the Swan Tower

Maybe the greatest center of learning and introspection in the universe, Kerith-Ald, the Swan Tower and the home of the goddess Ioun, sits high over the lagoon and other earthmotes. It soars only slightly lower but more leeward than the golden palace of Aurosion. The lower structure contains a magic university and the great Hall of Enlightenment, a place where great philosophers and wizards meet, verbally spar, and create great works of reason and arcane. Occasionally their wise mistress holds court here, as well. The upper section—the true Swan Tower—serves as a place for quiet reflection for Ioun when she is not wandering the universe in the search of knowledge.

Methion

The greatest concentration of mercantile emporiums, guildhalls, artisan workshops, and estates of those exalted houses chiefly involved in the Game of Making, the Methion is the best place to shop for magic items in Hestavar. If one cannot find an item here, the artisans have contact with an exalted trading house that can retrieve it, usually in short order. Visitors should beware—while the exalted of the Bright City have a reputation for haughtiness, this is especially true among the Erathis exalted of the Methion. Bored exalted look for any slight, real or merely perceived, as pretense for a duel.

Magic of Hestavar

The Game of Making constantly churns out new magic items and disseminates their schemas to the various traders and artisans that visit the city. Here is a selection of newer or locale-specific items that have not seen much replication or alteration abroad.

Magic Items

Hestavar Dueling Blade — Level 18+

Made with the mithral-infused shimmering steel favored by the greatest of Hestavar sword smiths, this weapon allows its wielder to maneuver like the exalted duelists of the Bright City.

Lvl 18 +4 85,000 gp Lvl 28 +6 2,125,000 gp
Lvl 24 +5 525,000 gp
Weapon: Light Blade
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d10 damage per plus
Property: You gain a +2 item bonus when making opportunity attacks and melee attacks as a part of an immediate reaction or immediate interrupt.
Power (Daily ✦ Teleportation): Free Action. After you miss with a melee attack with this weapon. Teleport 3 squares, but adjacent to the target of the triggering attack. Make a melee basic attack against the target.

Ioun Orb — Level 25+

A favorite implement of the orb mages of the Swan Tower, this crystal orb is filled with the potent purple haze of the Meznathin Expanse, and allows the caster to extend her will and arcane power to the orb's location.

Lvl 25 +5 625,000 gp Lvl 30 +6 3,125,000 gp
Implement (Orb)
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d8 psychic damage per plus
Property: The *Ioun orb* can be commanded to orbit around your body. Though you never touch the orb, its orbit is held aloft and controlled by the commands of one of your hands, and you are considered to be wielding this implement with that hand.
Power (Daily): Minor Action. You release the *Ioun orb* from your hand or its orbit, and you move it 5 squares into an unoccupied space, where it then hovers. The *orb* cannot be attacked or affected by another creature, though it does take up the space as though it were one of your allies.
You can deliver arcane attack powers through the *Ioun orb* as if you were wielding it (the attacks originate through the *Ioun orb's* space). You can do so as long as you sustain this power, provided that the *orb* is never more than 5 squares away from you. If you use the *orb* to use a daily attack power, or if the *orb* is ever more than 5 squares away from you, or if you are reduced to 0 or fewer hit points, the *orb* falls in the square it occupies and this power's effect ends.
Sustain Minor: You can move the *orb* 5 squares and make arcane attacks through it until the end of your next turn.

Circlet of the Urbane — Level 23

Created from pure astral light made solid by the arcane artisans of House Norsair, this circlet grants the urbane wisdom and resolve of the Bright City's exalted of Erathis.

Item Slot: Head 425,000 gp
Property: You can reroll any Diplomacy, Insight, or Streetwise check but must keep the second result, even if it is worse.
Property: You gain a +2 item bonus to saving throws against charm, fear, illusion, and psychic effects.
Power (Daily): Free Action. Use this power when you are hit by an attack that has the charm, fear, illusion, or psychic keyword. You take half damage from the attack, and if the attack has an effect that a saving throw can end, you can make a saving throw immediately against that effect as a free action.

City Intrigue, Adventure, and Sport

Maybe the universe's greatest tragedy is that sometimes wicked things can be done in the service of good.
–From the Lament of Pelor

Hestavar might be the closest thing to a true paradise that the universe has to offer. Watched over and administered by angels and the exalted souls rewarded for lives spent in the service of their patron deities, at first little seems amiss in the city. Visiting adventurers might soon become restless under the rays of its constant light, many using it as a brief stopover before engaging the powers of the Nine Hells, hunting githyanki pirates, or seeking the services of the enigmatic marut. But the longer one stays in the Bright City, the more likely one becomes embroiled in the city's intrigue and the dangers that lurk just under the surface of everyday life.

Exalted Intrigues

Although wherever there is power there is intrigue, competition acts as a catalyst to that admixture. For this reason few intrigues in the city are as convoluted and dangerous as the Game of Making. The game's stakes are high, since the exalted houses compete for not only market, but their standing in the city, their clout with the angelic bureaucracy, and respect in the eyes of the city's deities, especially Erathis and Ioun. Sometimes this competition can turn violent, since the death of an exalted craftsperson or thinker can result in a week and a day of lost work. In rare cases when the stakes are particularly high, entire houses, workshops, guilds, and even schools of study can break out into open war.

Exalted have other quarrels and conflicts of a more personal nature. Although one becomes an exalted as reward for a life in service to one's deity, they are only human (or eladrin, or dwarf, and so on) and while often wiser than they were in life, the jealousies, desires, guilts, and conceits a person had in life die hard. This compounded with the sentiment that most exalted see themselves as vastly superior to even the most powerful mortal in Hestavar often causes conflict between members of the two populations. Even if an exalted loses a conflict, he or she rarely admits it. After all, except for the case of egregious sins committed against the tenets of the prime deity, exalted are reborn and can begin the conflict anew if they so choose.

Although exalted as a general rule do not fear death, in the last few decades there has been a series of murders of exalted that have let some doubt creep into the most arrogant exalted's mind when facing probable demise. There have been no fewer than one hundred exalted murdered and lost forever by a killer known only by his calling card: the Obsidian Dagger. Though even Ioun has tried to augur the murder's identity, he is still on the loose, attacking with regularity, and targeting exalted engaged in the Game of Making in one way or another.

Evil Powers and Plots

Although the angelic bureaucracy tends to downplay the threat, a number of evil creatures and powers are within the Bright City. Each poses its own threat and potential adventure.

The most open force of evil in the city is the embassy of the Nine Hells, led by the male (or seemingly male) succubus, Naberius Sain. Seen as

a necessary evil by the angelic bureaucracy, the succubus allows Hestavar to work diplomacy with Asmodeus and his ilk, which is preferred to war. Many (rightly) assume that Naberius Sain is the master of diabolical plots in Hestavar. To the angels of Whitebell Bastion, he is the chief person of interest related to the Obsidian Dagger murders, but if he is the murderer, the canny succubus has evaded all but mere suspicion. By all outward appearances he is a careful diplomat with a laundry list of alibis who, despite his infernal nature, has been an ally to the Bright City and keeps the devils under his command under strict and lawful control. But succubi are wily adversaries, and Sain is one of the most powerful of his kind, as well as a favorite of Glaysa, so it surprises no one that he has evaded any proof of wrongdoing.

More troubling are the unseen evils that lurk among the Bright City's rare shadow. Constant reports come in about primordial and abyssal cults that haunt the Salts and look to resurrect Heur-Ket from his blustering slumber or channel what remains of his essence for evil or destructive ends. Every so often other evil powers meddle in the affairs of Hestavar. Vecna covets the secrets of Kerith-Ald, Lolth loves to meddle among the politics of the Game of Making, and some believe that several of the more cutthroat exalted have turned to Zehir for favors and allies in their struggles.

Sport, Blood, and Otherwise

Much adventure in the city takes the form of contests of skill. The scions of exalted houses love to duel with either spell or sword—often to the death. A prerequisite to such an activity is the pretense of defending one's honor, but these outrages are often flimsier than a devil's concern and put up only as a matter of form. Often they make concessions for the mortals they challenge, and many have a particularly nasty desire to test newcomers as their way of weeding out undesirables from the city.

Although dueling is popular, less bloody sports are preferred by most citizens of the city. Many neighborhoods and group of neighborhoods support wrestling dens, dueling clubs, and football teams. These athletic contests are a way for members of the diverse neighborhoods and motes to mingle. Often, larger events take place on the Field of Ida, where even members of neighborhood without flat parks can participate in the festivities.

Probably the most anticipated, wagered upon, and universally enjoyed sport in the city is the Storm's Eye Run. This ten-lap race sends aerial mounted riders through a course that starts at the Aurosion and then downward to the Eye of the Storm, and back around Pelor's and Erathis's palace three times. Though the Storm's Eye Run is open to any flying mount, it has become a matter of pride and tradition that the mount of choice is the Hestavar racing drake.

Hestavar Racing Drake

Although the world contains a plethora of different drake forms, drakes are not unknown among the planes. A number of different types of drakes inhabit the Astral Sea, but one of the most well-known drakes is the Hestavar racing drake. Originating from a species that hunts the skies of the Elemental Chaos, these drakes were brought to the Bright City countless cen-

turies ago (some breeders claim it happened during Heur-Ket's invasion of the Astral Sea) and trained as racing steeds. The generations of selective breeding and magic augmentation have made these animals the quintessential mounts of the Storm's Eye Run, the most celebrated of the city's sky races.

Hestavar Racing Drake	**Level 23 Skirmisher**
Large immortal beast (reptile)	XP 5,100
Initiative +21 **Senses** Perception +21	
HP 217; **Bloodied** 108	
AC 37; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 36, **Will** 34	
Resist 15 lightning, 15 thunder	
Speed 6, fly 12	
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)	
Melee 2; +34 vs. AC; 2d10 + 10 damage.	
↓ **Flyby Attack** (standard; at-will)	
The Hestavar racing drake flies 10 squares and makes one melee basic attack at any point during that movement. The drake doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when moving away from the target of the attack.	
⇙ **Lightning Burst** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Lightning**	
Close blast 2; 3d8 + 8 lightning damage and the target is dazed until the end of the racing drake's next turn.	
Lightning Leap (move action; while mounted by a friendly rider of 23rd level or higher; consumes a use of *lightning burst*, recharges when that power recharges) ✦ **Mount, Teleportation**	
The racing drake and the rider teleport 20 squares.	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –	
Skills Endurance+23	
Str 23 (+17) **Dex** 26 (+19) **Wis** 22 (+17)	
Con 25 (+18) **Int** 4 (+8) **Cha** 12 (+12)	

Hestavar Racing Drake Tactics

Primarily bred and raised for racing, Hestavar racing drakes rarely are encountered outside the city's racing circuit. But those contests can often turn vicious. Biting is not against the rules, and the drake's flyby attack is used against other contestants during the laps. Riders often make strategic decisions on whether to use the drake's *lightning burst* or *lightning leap* ability, depending on the closeness of the race or the racers.

The Call of Destiny

Rarely do the gods call mortals toward adventure and intrigue, but if they ever choose to do so, they use the form of an angelic messenger or work through an exarch. Often, they reserve this kind of attention to pressing matters of an epic's character destiny. Sometimes other powers and circumstances tug at the destinies of mortals who visit the city. For centuries the Eye of the Storm has called a select few to determine the eventual ultimate fate of the primordial Heur-Ket.

Epic Destiny

The following epic destiny is tied closely to the background and the history of Hestavar, and it is ideal for a player who enjoys strong ties to a setting, or a player who enjoys the destiny side of epic destinies. Because it involves a trigger that occurs near or during the epic levels, this might also be an excellent path for a player who is having a hard time choosing an epic destiny.

Prison of the Winds

You are one of few beings of the universe called to imprison the residual essence of primordial Heur-Ket. Your destiny, and the destiny of this primordial, are now tied for eternity or the end of your existence, whichever comes first.

Prerequisite: 21st level

You've known for a long time that you're destined for a great deed, but unlike some of your companions who strive toward a specific destiny, you knew that yours would pick you. Upon entering the Eye of the Storm in Hestavar, a sliver of the primordial's remaining essence entered you, like it has hundreds of other powerful in the millennia before your coming. You have become the Prison of the Winds, and it might be your destiny to either finally destroy the primordial Heur-Ket, or as some fear, finally release it, so that it can renew its ancient assault upon the Astral Sea. But there is a great danger. You are not the first being to take on this burden, and all who have come before you have been utterly destroyed by the destructive chaos of Heur-Ket's churning essence. Can you survive where so many others have failed?

Immortal Destruction or Agent of Destiny

Just taking on the fragment of Heur-Ket makes you an agent of destiny, and a piece in the eternal conflict between the deities and primordials. Agents of both attempt to push you in the direction they favor. The gods of Hestavar and their servants, and even other powers of the Astral Sea from angels to githyanki, to devils, attempt to push your actions toward the primordial's destruction.

The entire time, your existence is on a short fuse. For as long as you hold the essence, you can gain power from it, but it slowly erodes body, animus, and soul until you finally fulfill your destiny.

Destruction of Heur-Ket: If you choose the right path, perform the correct deeds and fulfill the correct prophecies, you can destroy the remaining essence of this primordial. The Eye of Storm diminishes and finally dissipates completely, and Ioun calls you to her service as an esteemed member of her cognoscenti.

Resurrection of Heur-Ket: Choose poorly, or be swayed toward the side of primordials, and you could ultimately release Heur-Ket's essence, which would lead to the resurrection of this dangerous primordial.

Ultimate Destruction: As has happened to the many that have come before you, the burden of

Plotting the Destiny

The features of this paragon path are confined to the powers that the essence of Heur-Ket grants the PCs. The prophecies of destruction, the path of resurrection, and the subtle erosion of the PC over time is up to you, the Dungeon Master, to decide the particulars and narrate (though the Storm Form feature does hint at a form of the path's possibility of character erosion).

imprisoning even a fragment of a primordial's essence has taken its toll. As your body is finally eroded by its power, you can take small comfort in the fact that you did not herald its resurrection, and you will be remembered as one of the few who tried to tame the seemingly untamable winds of Heur-Ket.

Prison of the Winds Features

Prison of the Winds has the following epic destiny features:

Essence of Heur-Ket (21st level): Increase your Constitution and Dexterity by 2, and gain a +2 bonus to speed.

Storm Surge (24th level): The first time you are reduced to 0 or fewer hit points each day, you can spend a healing surge (no action required), or if you don't have any more healing surges, gain your Constitution score in hit points. You can then push all creatures within 5 squares of you a number of squares equal to your Constitution modifier and then knock them prone.

Storm Form (30th level): When you are bloodied, you become insubstantial. When you are no longer bloodied, you are no longer insubstantial.

Prison of the Winds Power

Fury of Heur-Ket Prison of the Winds Utility 26

You focus your fragment of the essence of Heur-Ket into a wind that surrounds you, gives your movement flight, and grants windswept strength to your melee attacks.

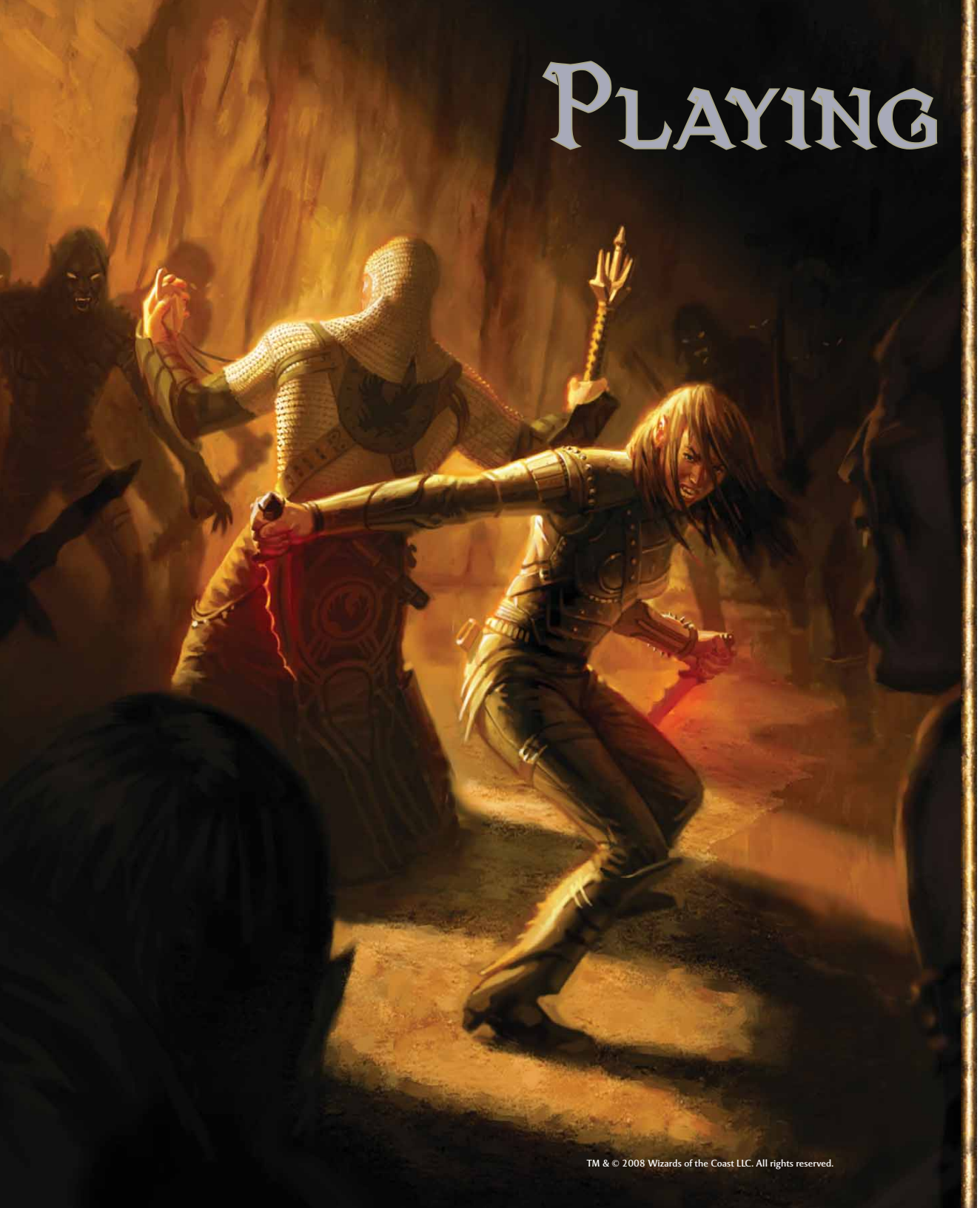
Daily ✦ Stance
Minor Action Personal

Effect: Until the stance ends, gain a fly speed equal to your land speed (hover), and when you hit an adjacent enemy with a melee attack, you can choose to push it a number of squares equal to your Constitution modifier or knock it prone.

About the Author

Born on a stormy Christmas day, in our nation's capital, during the Nixon administration, the stars were definitely wrong when **Stephen Radney-MacFarland** came screaming into the world. Spending most of his impressionable years as a vagabond and ne're-do-well, Stephen eventually settled in the Northwest to waste his life on roleplaying games.

Once that RPGA® guy, Stephen is now a developer in RPG R&D where he doesn't create the traps . . . he just makes them deadlier. He also teaches a class on roleplaying design for the Art Institute of Seattle, molding the minds of young and upcoming designers. Be afraid. Be very afraid.



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Playing Dhampyr

by Brian R. James

illustrations byRyan Barger, Eric Deschamps, and Chris Seaman

Decades before, a conflagration left the Abbey of Turvlies in ruins. Only the hidden catacombs remained, buried and forgotten beneath charred timber and smoldering ash. Yet even when bloodied and lost in the labyrinthine corridors beneath the monastery, the Order of the Dawn Covenant held strong to their faith in the Risen Sun.

Grim determination etched on their faces, the warrior-priests formed a tight phalanx and pressed through the throng of vampire spawn, their shields repelling wicked claws and poisoned daggers. First to fall was pious young Dianne. Even Master Leon was cut down, and his signature morningstar clanged against the stone floor before coming to rest near the corpse of Elder Coley.

With nary a hint of desperation, two remaining clerics fought on, with maces held high and deft prayers on their lips. Just as endurance threatened to fail them where their zeal had not, Brother Barnes and Sister Fillenia burst into a damp natural chamber flooded with sunlight—the lowest reaches of a well shaft tapping a long forgotten cistern.

Welcoming the sanctuary from the pursuing vampires, the young priests were startled to discover they were not alone. Gazing at the two of them with piercing green eyes was a young woman who rested at the pool's edge. Mesmerized, Sister Fillenia never saw the first woman's twin enter the chamber. The young priest was dead before she felt the fatal thrust of the other woman's serrated dagger.

Only then did a cry of anguish escape the lips of the last priest standing. Brother Barnes knew only doom stood before him, yet he quickly composed himself. Drawing in a steadying breath and raising his mace in salute, he dared the dhampyrs to approach.

—Chronicler unknown.

Dhampyr

A creature between the world of the living and the dead, the dhampyr is shrouded in secrecy and harbors a fierce bloodlust.

A rare crossbreed with several of the powers of a vampire and none of the weaknesses, a dhampyr is thought to be born of the union of a vampire male and a mortal female. The truth is that such hybrids are far more common than many folk think. A dhampyr can result from a vampire biting a pregnant female, as well as through more mundane means. Some offspring carry the spark of immortality in their veins for years, until the kindling of fate gives the spark a place to catch.

Play a dhampyr if you want . . .
✦ a character of a usual race but with a secret twist.
✦ to play a hero a lot like a vampire.
✦ to have access to supernatural powers like those of a vampire.

Half-Blood

A dhampyr is not a true race like those presented in the *Player's Handbook*. If you wish to play a dhampyr, choose another race as normal, and then select the Vampiric Heritage feat to gain dhampyr abilities. If you do not select the Vampiric Heritage feat at 1st level, your Dungeon Master might require you to explain how your character awakened dhampyr powers. Likewise, your Dungeon Master can rule you cannot retrain bloodline feats without an explanation of how your character loses such heritage when retraining.

Physical Qualities

A dhampyr, whatever his or her base race, can be mistaken for some sort of fey creature due to pale skin, willowy features, unnatural charisma, and slightly pointed ears. Closer inspection, however, reveals subtle traits inherited from the vampire parent. A dhampyr has pronounced canines that extend when the dhampyr is enduring stress, feeding on blood, or experiencing other sorts of excitement. However, a dhampyr's eyes—pale orbs with splashes of red around piercing black pupils—often give away the creature's true heritage.

Despite these characteristics, a dhampyr frequently adopts the culture in which he or she is raised. From this culture, or in rebellion against it, the dhampyr takes habits of personal decoration and manner. For instance, a dwarf dhampyr looks and acts much like normal dwarves.

Immortal heritage greatly extends a dhampyr's life expectancy. Barring inadvertent death, a dhampyr can expect to live an additional century without experiencing the serious infirmities of old age.

Male vampires do father a few dhampyrs, but this occurrence is rare. Others are the offspring of one or two dhampyr parents, since the supernatural force of the vampire blood is strong enough to influence generations. Dhampyrs can also have normal offspring. Furthermore, the age at which dhampyr abilities manifest varies with each dhampyr.

Playing a Dhampyr

The image of the dhampyr is that of a mysterious outsider swathed in shadow—a lonesome antihero seldom at peace with society or self. Dhampyrs are mortal. They have no exceptional vulnerability to sunlight or radiant damage. Because of this, true vampires sometimes refer to dhampyrs as "daywalkers."

Life for a dhampyr might be more difficult or easier than it is for another child. The difficulty depends entirely on how others in the child's surroundings view dhampyr heritage. A dhampyr raised among accepting (or merely unknowing) people could have a normal childhood. Another might face severe prejudice, while yet another might be raised to believe in his or her natural superiority. A few dhampyrs are raised among vampires, who treat them as special but lesser creatures.

As might be expected, dhampyrs aware of their true heritage sometimes develop a morbid fascination with death, shadow, and undead. This leads to quirks other living mortals find disconcerting, ranging among blood drinking, macabre fashion sense, gallows humor, extreme bloodlust, and other dark behaviors. Dhampyr villains can have habits that are much more disturbing.

Some dhampyrs have a preternatural resistance to a vampire's signature attack: *blood drain*. Coupled with the ability to recognize those of vampire blood, dhampyr make effective vampire slayers. These avenging heroes, however, seldom limit themselves to solely hunting vampires. They are equally adept at tracking and slaying several forms of undead, as well as demons and other infernal beings.

Dhampyr Characteristics: Attractive, guarded, methodical, nimble, obsessive, patient, reticent, somber, vengeful, vigilant

Dhampyr Names: A dhampyr is named in accordance with the culture in which he or she is born and raised. Notable exceptions include the rare dhampyr children raised by vampires—see the Clan Vampires sidebar.

Clan Vampires

Vampires sometimes form extended alliances that include several vampires, who are sometimes related by blood. They call these families "clans." Such clans form extended networks of servants, mortal and otherwise. Clan vampires especially prize dhampyr servants, whom they exalt as favored beings over normal mortals. The dhampyrs are afforded special privileges in vampire society, and they are given names honoring ancient or legendary vampires.

Male Clan Names: Aponan, Ctenmiir, Drakuul, Emerus, Gulthias, Kas, Israfel, Lasudael, Marius, Orbak, Radu, Strahd, Viktor, Zandriel

Female Clan Names: Akasha, Bathori, Carmilla, Celene, Eshar, Kalaes, Lucia, Mariam, Nemeh, Ophelia, Ruthven, Sibella, Tanith, Vestra, Zeleska

Dhampyr Adventurers

Three sample dhampyr adventurers are described below.

Lucia is a human dhampyr ranger. Like most daywalkers raised in a vampire clan, Lucia is the product of purposeful breeding between vampires and humans. Since a young age, she has trained diligently, honing herself into an unparalleled tracker and deadly killer. At seventeen Lucia completed her training, and she fled into the world to escape the oppressive society of the undead. With clan loyalists hunting her, Lucia has joined with other adventurers for protection. She uses her skills to protect her new "clan."

Jufrum is a half-orc barbarian whose latent vampiric heritage has surfaced only recently, after a trip to the Shadowfell. Secretly, he has focused on his tainted blood to increase his strength and ferocity. As his power grows, he plans to tap his undead nature to surprise his enemies and, for a time, his companions. Jufrum has no emotional or societal connection to the undead, and he sees his dark bloodline as a blessing.

Nedda is a halfling dhampyr rogue with vengeance seething in her heart. Although her halfling clan accepted her, Nedda was never allowed to forget that her halfling father and several others died defending her mother from the vampire who made Nedda what she is. Nedda has fully committed her life to the eradication of vampires. After discovering her vampire forebear was a member of an extended bloodsucking family, the halfling dhampyr has decided to hunt and slay them all. She has gathered a group of likeminded slayers, and they wander from town to town ferreting out the undead.

Feats

Being a dhampyr means having the Vampiric Heritage feat. Dhampyrs also have racial feats that expand on their vampire nature. A number of these feats are power-swap feats. If you use retraining to replace a power-swap feat with another feat, you lose any power gained from the power-swap feat and regain a power of the same level from your primary class.

The Vampiric Heritage and other dhampyr feats are part of a new classification of feat known as bloodline feats. All bloodline feats are noted as such in the feat's name. You can have bloodline feats of only one type; thus, if you choose the Vampiric Heritage feat, you can have only Vampire Bloodline feats.

Vampiric Heritage [Vampire Bloodline]

Prerequisite: Living humanoid race

Benefit: You gain *blood drain* as an encounter power. Additionally, you gain a +2 bonus to Perception and Insight checks to sense and recognize dhampyrs and undead.

Special: You are considered a vampire for the purpose of effects that relate to vampires.

Blood Drain

Vigor rushes through your body as you drain life energy from your victim

Encounter ✦ Healing
Standard Action **Melee** touch
Target: One living creature you have grabbed
Attack: Strength +2 vs. Fortitude, Constitution +2 vs. Fortitude, or Dexterity +2 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d4 + Constitution modifier damage, and you can spend a healing surge.
Increase to +4 bonus and 2d4 + Constitution modifier damage at 11th level; +6 bonus and 3d4 + Constitution modifier damage at 21st level.
Special: When you select the Vampiric Heritage feat, you determine whether you use Strength, Constitution, or Dexterity to attack with this power.

Heroic Tier Feats

Any feat in the following section is available to any dhampyr character of any level who meets the prerequisites.

Vampire Alacrity [Vampire Bloodline]

Prerequisite: Vampiric Heritage feat
Benefit: You gain a +1 feat bonus to your speed.

Mist Form [Vampire Bloodline]

Prerequisites: 10th level, Vampiric Heritage feat
Benefit: You can swap one 10th-level or higher utility power you know for *mist form*.

Mist Form

Your form dissolves into an eerie, billowing mist.

Daily ✦ Polymorph
Standard Action **Personal**
Effect: You become insubstantial and gain a fly speed of 8 (hover), but you cannot make any attacks. This lasts until the end of your next turn.
Sustain Minor: Your *mist form* persists.

Night's Sight [Vampire Bloodline]

Prerequisite: Vampiric Heritage feat
Benefit: You gain low-light vision.

Paragon Tier Feats

Any feat in the following section is available to a dhampyr character of 11th level or higher who meets the prerequisites.

Bloodied Regeneration [Vampire Bloodline]

Prerequisites: 11th level, Vampiric Heritage feat
Benefit: You can swap one 10th-level or higher utility power you know for *bloodied regeneration*.

Bloodied Regeneration

Your wounds call to your immortal blood, which surges to repair your body.

Daily ✦ Healing
Minor Action **Personal**
Requirement: You must be bloodied.
Effect: You gain regeneration 5 until the end of the encounter or until you are no longer bloodied, whichever comes first.

Dominating Gaze [Vampire Bloodline]

Prerequisites: 15th level, Vampiric Heritage feat
Benefit: You can swap one 15th-level or higher daily attack power you know for *dominating gaze*.

Dominating Gaze

The authority in your piercing gaze demands utter submission.

Daily ✦ Charm
Minor Action **Ranged** 5
Target: One creature
Attack: Intelligence +4 vs. Will, Wisdom +4 vs. Will, or Charisma +4 vs. Will
Increase to +6 bonus at 21st level.
Hit: The target is dominated (save ends). *Aftereffect:* The target is dazed (save ends).
Miss: The target is dazed (save ends).
Special: When you select the Dominating Gaze feat, you determine whether you use Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma to attack with this power.

Savage Bite [Vampire Bloodline]

Prerequisites: 11th level, Vampiric Heritage feat
Benefit: You can use your blood drain power on a target granting you combat advantage without having that target grabbed.

Epic Tier Feat

The feat in the following section is available to a dhampyr character of 21st level or higher who meets the prerequisites.

Scent of Blood [Vampire Bloodline]

Prerequisites: 21st level, Vampire Bloodline feat
Benefit: Living, bloodied enemies grant you combat advantage.

Paragon Paths

The following paragon paths work well with dhampyr characters.

Bloodknight

"Despite the depravity of my upbringing, I have become a hero to people I was raised to view as mere cattle."

Prerequisites: Defender role, Vampiric Heritage feat

Your vampire heritage has served only to make you a stronger warrior. It could be that you grew up in a vampire clan, and were shaped and honed into a perfect weapon for their aims. Several like you have such a history. Or maybe you've listened to your blood's whispers, gaining supernatural talents as a reward for your efforts. The blood of your enemies cries out to your own. You sense those you have marked for death like a wolf smell's fear in the hunted. Your adversaries are your prey, to be driven where you wish and ultimately struck down to supplement your strength.

Bloodknight Features

Blood-Calling Action (11th level): When you spend an action point to make an extra attack, you also mark all enemies within close burst 2 until the end of your next turn.

Taste for Blood (11th level): Whenever you reduce a bloodied enemy you have marked to 0 hit points, you recharge your *blood drain* power and can use it again during this encounter.

Marked Blood (16th level): Whenever you grab a target you have marked, you can use your *blood drain* power on that target immediately as a free action.

Bloodknight Powers

Bloodseeking Strike

You strike hard enough to crumple armor and hew the toughest hide, leaving your enemy open to further attack.

Encounter ✦ Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier damage, and you grab the target. Until the end of your next turn, you gain a +2 power bonus to Fortitude and Reflex against attempts to break your grab.

Mistblood Form

You draw upon your ties to vampire nature so that you can step between life and death to slay body and spirit.

Daily ✦ Stance
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You gain phasing and deal full damage to insubstantial creatures.

Dance of Blood

Your enemies stagger under your imposing gaze and line up for slaughter.

Daily ✦ Stance
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: At the start of your turn, you can slide one adjacent enemy 1 square. You can then make a melee basic attack against that enemy as a free action provided that enemy is within your reach.

Deadstalker

"Immortality is at an end, parasite."

Prerequisite: Vampiric Heritage feat

With the innate ability to sniff out the undead, you have dedicated your life to the stalking and slaying of such abominations. Perhaps the calling of this vocation was passed down from your parents as a macabre tradition. Maybe vengeance has motivated you to slay the unliving. Perhaps you've turned your birthright into an asset that allows you to protect those weaker than you. You have channeled your sharp perception into deadly accuracy and slippery maneuverability—both of which also serve you against the living.

Deadstalker Path Features

Deadstalker's Action (11th level): When you spend an action point to take an extra action, you do not grant combat advantage to any enemy for any reason and cannot be grabbed until the end of your next turn.

Indomitable Blood (11th level): You gain a +2 bonus to saving throws against charm and fear effects.

Deadeye (16th level): Once per round you gain a +5 bonus to damage rolls against a single undead target you hit with an attack.

Deadstalker Powers

For your attack powers, you choose Strength or Dexterity for the attack, as appropriate for your class, fighting style, and weapon. You use the chosen ability to determine your attack roll bonus and damage roll bonus.

Impaling Blow

Your precise blow transfixes your enemy.

Encounter ✦ Weapon
Standard Action **Melee or Ranged** weapon
Special: You can shift 2 squares before making this attack.
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. AC or Dexterity vs. AC
Hit: 3[W] + Strength or Dexterity modifier damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of your next turn.

Instant Escape

You know how to slip out of an unwanted embrace.

Encounter
Immediate Interrupt **Personal**
Trigger: You are grabbed.
Effect: You escape the grab and shift 2 squares.

Deadeye Strike

With careful aim, you strike a decisive blow at your enemy's weakest spot.

Daily ✦ Weapon
Standard Action **Melee or Ranged** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. AC or Dexterity vs. AC
Special: When using this power, you score a critical hit on a natural attack roll of 18 or higher.
Hit: 4[W] + Strength or Dexterity modifier damage.
Miss: Half damage.

NEW MONSTERS

Seemingly ordinary humanoids, dhampyrs have terrifying powers gained from their relation to vampires. This combination of normalcy and hidden power makes a dhampyr a formidable predator.

Bloodcrazed Duergar Dhampyr **Level 8 Elite Brute**
Medium natural humanoid (devil, vampire) XP 700

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +11; darkvision
HP 214; **Bloodied** 107
AC 22; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 21
Resist 5 fire, 5 poison
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
+10 vs. AC; 1d12 + 5 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Blood Frenzy (standard; at-will)
The bloodcrazed duergar dhampyr makes two claw attacks. If the first claw attack hits a target, the dhampyr can attempt to grab that target instead of making the second claw attack.

Blood Letting (standard; requires a grabbed target; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
Melee 1; +9 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 5 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends), and the bloodcrazed duergar dhampyr regains 25 hit points.

Quills (minor; encounter) ☒ **Poison**
Ranged 3; +10 vs. AC; 2d8 + 8 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven
Skills Dungeoneering +11, Stealth +12
Str 20 (+9) **Dex** 17 (+7) **Wis** 15 (+6)
Con 17 (+7) **Int** 9 (+3) **Cha** 10 (+4)

Bloodcrazed Duergar Dhampyr Tactics

A cunning hunter, a bloodcrazed duergar dhampyr stalks its prey to attack at an opportune moment. If doing so is tactically sound, the dhampyr picks its target and uses *quills* on that foe first. It then throws itself into the middle of its prey, scything away with its claws. Once bloodied, the dhampyr uses *blood letting* to drain a victim of blood and heal itself.

Dhampyr Assassin **Level 13 Elite Lurker**
Medium natural humanoid, human (vampire) XP 1,600

Initiative +16 **Senses** Perception +12; low-light vision
HP 198; **Bloodied** 99
AC 29; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 26
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Kukri** (standard; at-will) ◻ **Weapon**
+18 vs. AC; 1d6 + 8 damage (reroll any damage die result of 1).

Blood Run (standard; at-will) ◻ **Weapon**
The dhampyr assassin moves 6 squares and makes two melee basic attacks at any point during that movement. It does not provoke opportunity attacks when moving away from the targets of these attacks.

Tear the Vein (standard; requires combat advantage; encounter) ◻ **Healing**
+16 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 6 damage, and the dhampyr assassin regains 25 hit points.

Misty Step (standard; at-will)
The dhampyr assassin gains insubstantial, phasing, and concealment until the end of its next turn or until it attacks, whichever comes first.

Combat Advantage
The dhampyr assassin deals 3d6 extra damage to targets it has combat advantage against.

Strike from the Shadows
If the dhampyr assassin misses with an attack while hidden, it remains hidden.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Acrobatics +17, Athletics +15, Stealth +17
Str 18 (+10) **Dex** 22 (+12) **Wis** 12 (+7)
Con 15 (+8) **Int** 15 (+8) **Cha** 19 (+10)
Equipment leather armor, 2 kukris

Dhampyr Assassin Tactics

A dhampyr assassin initiates combat from hiding with *strike from the shadows*. It then employs *blood run* with an eye toward combat advantage.

Dhampyr Coercer **Level 17 Elite Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, eladrin (vampire) XP 3,200

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +15; low-light vision
HP 324; **Bloodied** 162
AC 33; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 32
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Katar** (standard; at-will) ◻ **Weapon**
+22 vs. AC; 2d6 + 7 damage (crit 4d6 + 19 damage).

Blood Dance (standard; at-will) ◻ **Weapon**
The dhampyr coercer makes two melee basic attacks. Each hit also slides the target 1 square.

Tear the Vein (standard; requires combat advantage; encounter) ◻ **Healing**
+19 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 6 damage, and the dhampyr coercer regains 40 hit points.

Luring Gaze (minor 1/round; at-will) ◻ **Charm, Gaze**
Ranged 5; +20 vs. Will; the target is pulled 3 squares and dazed (save ends). This attack doesn't provoke opportunity attacks.

Repelling Gaze (standard; at-will) ◻ **Fear, Gaze**
Close burst 3; targets enemies; +19 vs. Will; 1d8 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares.

Bloody Fey Step (move; encounter)
The dhampyr coercer teleports 5 squares and gains combat advantage against any target that it ends its teleport adjacent to.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Bluff +20, Stealth +15
Str 12 (+9) **Dex** 21 (+13) **Wis** 15 (+10)
Con 18 (+12) **Int** 16 (+11) **Cha** 24 (+15)
Equipment leather armor, katar

Dhampyr Coercer Tactics

A dhampyr coercer opens combat with *luring gaze*. If the coercer has multiple enemies nearby, it uses *repelling gaze* to drive them away. The dhampyr employs *blood dance* to further isolate one foe or to take on two enemies at once. If surrounded by foes, the dhampyr might spend an action point to use *repelling gaze*.

Dhampyr Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Nature or Religion check.

DC 15: A dhampyr is a humanoid with blood tainted by vampire forebears. Such a creature is typically the result of a union between a normal mortal and a dhampyr.

DC 20: Despite the powers they can share in common with vampires, dhampyrs are not undead. As such, they possess no vulnerability to sunlight and radiant attacks. Vampires sometimes employ dhampyrs as mortal assassins, guardians, and soldiers.

Encounter Groups

Dhampyrs can be found anywhere a creature of the same race might be found. They also live among vampires and other sentient undead. Each dhampyr is unique, with his or her own allies and agenda.

Level 7 Encounter (XP 1,650)
✦ 1 bloodcrazed duergar dhampyr (level 8 elite brute)
✦ 1 bloodweb spider swarm (level 7 soldier)
✦ 1 crimson acolyte (level 7 skirmisher)
✦ 1 flameskull (level 8 artillery)

Level 14 Encounter (XP 5,600)
✦ 1 human wizard lich (level 14 elite controller)
✦ 1 dhampyr assassin (level 13 elite lurker)
✦ 2 boneclaws (level 14 soldier)

Level 17 Encounter (XP 8,800)
✦ 1 dhampyr coercer (level 17 elite controller)
✦ 1 stone golem (level 17 elite soldier)
✦ 2 rakshasa warriors (level 15 soldier)

About the Author

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Origin Stories

by Bruce R. Cordell

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Behind the Curtain: Warforged in the Forgotten Realms Setting?

The Forgotten Realms® and Eberron® campaign settings can accommodate every one of the core D&D® rules. However, a campaign setting has a particular set of stories to tell, and sometimes the best stories are those that are proscribed in some fashion. For instance, in our published games and novels, you might never see a warforged character in the Forgotten Realms setting, or a genasi character in the Eberron setting. However, with the release of the *Eberron Campaign Setting*, you'll have the option of choosing a warforged as a character. You might even have that choice sooner, if your DM allows you to use the rules for playing warforged released in *Dragon*® #364. Likewise, with the release of the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, you have the choice of choosing a genasi as a character. However, in a vacuum of official support for a race not described in a campaign setting, you might wonder how your nonstandard race came to exist in the campaign. If so, this article aims to provide you with a list of several official possible origins for your game character.

The Forgotten Realms campaign setting spans Faerûn, Returned Abeir, and other continents of the world. This place of many extremes also has numerous races, including the energy-embodied genasi who manifest fire, lightning, and other elements by mere desire. Genasi are most likely encountered in Akanûl or Calimshan.

The Eberron campaign setting features swashbuckling action and dark fantasy, and the impact of the Last War yet reverberates across

the world, tangling destiny's skein. One of the many repercussions of the Last War are the warforged, a race of living constructs sculpted of iron, stone, and wood designed to be soldiers. With the Last War over, the warforged wander the land, struggling to find acceptance. Warforged were born in vanished Cyre, now the desolate Mournland, but except for some that congregate there, they exist all across Khorvaire.

For all the extremes of the Forgotten Realms, it is a world not known for its warforged. And for all Eberron's magical marvels, genasi apparently never came there.

But that doesn't mean it couldn't happen in your game.

Playing a Warforged in Toril

Most races in Toril have one or two specific background stories that account for their presence in the world. However, warforged are too rare in Faerûn, Returned Abeir, or lands eastward to have any one common origin. This section describes likely origin stories for your warforged character.

As a warforged who originated in Toril, you are not part of a collective race—you might be one of a kind, or perhaps one of a few unique specimens. Others assume you are related as much to golems as to living creatures. This means you can't necessarily rely on the stereotypical racial attitudes to help define your behavior, because in the Forgotten Realms setting, too few warforged (perhaps only you) exist to allow anyone to draw conclusions about what's normal for you.

Once you choose an origin story for your warforged character, you can work out the fine details of your history with your DM.

One-Off Wizard Experiment

You are the ritual-born creation of a long-dead experimenter, stored away in a wizard's tower and forgotten for who knows how many years. Your designer, apparently a fine artificer and golem sculptor, disappeared long ago and never returned to her tower of wizardry. You only recently gained consciousness when the tower was ransacked by a team of adventurers who won their way past the formidable tower defenses only to find your half-organic, half-metallic cocoon. The adventurers accidentally woke you, perhaps for the very first time, believing you to be a toy they could sell or golem they could command. Soon enough, they realized your true nature and invited you to join them.

Character Motivations

One or more primary desires might influence you.

The Fate of Your Creator: You have an overriding curiosity to learn more about the one who gave you form and spirit, what purpose she had in mind for you, and why she left you inactive and alone for several years. Did she create you as a guardian? A companion? A messenger to a harsher clime where mere flesh might fail? You have no way of knowing, though you constantly imagine with scenarios that might explain your creation. You also try to chase down every last clue about your creator, hoping to one day find her decades-old (or longer?) trail and discover who she was and what you were meant to be.

Another Like Me: When the adventurers woke you from your cocooned slumber, they told you (or you saw for yourself) that another half-living, half-metallic cocoon lay right beside your own. However, this one was empty and open. It was either never used, or whoever once occupied it emerged years before you. If so, why did your fellow not wake you? Was it taken away by the wizard when she left? You must know—the thought that another like you walks Toril is an idea you can't get out of your head. Now and then, you find golems that approach your complexity, but you are disappointed. None seem to be alive in the way you are. Someday, you hope, you will discover another warforged.

Roleplaying Option: Though considerable knowledge was pre-implanted in your mind, such as language and some in-depth skills and abilities, you are naïve about the world in some ways. This either makes you very curious and eager to learn new things from anyone willing to engage, or perhaps standoffish and afraid to reveal your terrible ignorance; when you don't understand something, you shrug as if you couldn't care in the least.

Lantan's Remnant

You remember the crashing waves that rolled in from all sides as the world shook and shuddered. You saw birds in their thousands take flight as if of one mind and then arrow into the east. You heard the ominous roar from the coast and saw the mountain-size breakers smash over the docks as if they were kindling. You were there when the tsunami hit Lantan nearly a century ago. And that's the last thing you recall.

Then you opened your eyes in the dank hold of a salvager's vessel. Struggling free of nets and seaweed and breaking free decades of barnacles from your skin, you gave the crew quite a scare when you heaved yourself up into daylight. Whether you soothed the crew's fears or were forced to swim for the safety of the nearest shore, you learned that time had passed since your last watery memories. You learned that when the water receded, the island land was nearly gone. All its machines, its technology, and its people were drowned. The land is reduced in area, and its golemwork marvels lie rusting below the waves. Supposedly, a monster sinks any ship that draws near.

You are a marvel of spirit-infused clockwork that surpassed all Lantan's previous craft. You were con-

structed just in time to be the island's swan song. Sometimes, the screams of the dying Lantanese echo again in your mind during the quiet night hours when your mind wanders.

Character Motivations

One or more primary desires might influence you.

A Century Gone: You were somehow rendered inert for more than ninety years. You resent that stolen time and wonder at all the changes that occurred during it. New cities and nations have sprung up; old ones have fallen—not the least being the fall of your own nation, Lantan. What other crazy changes have sprung up in that time? For instance, you've heard rumors of a new continent appearing out of the mist west across the Trackless Sea—a place some call Returned Abeir. With no homeland to call your own any longer, you decide to travel the world and see what there is to see.

A Nation Reborn: You are not interested in hearing, for the hundredth time, that Lantan is gone for good. You believe you can bring it back. Somehow. The details are hazy at the moment. But first things first: Your goal is to locate any other survivors (or their descendants, in most cases) and share with them your dream. Others might have survived the cataclysm. Right?

Roleplaying Option: Your speech is riddled with anachronisms and out-of-date references, but hey, you grew up in a different era. This might lead some people to believe you are dim-witted and not "alive." You sometimes reconsider your actions, but in the meantime, you don't mind taking advantage of those who underestimate you.

Red Wizard Exclusive

A Red Wizard enclave is usually a small mercantile manor sited within the walls of a city large enough to support robust magical trade. Red Wizard enclaves can be found in many of the major coastal cities of the Sea of Fallen Stars, as well as in the Moonsea region. In addition to dealing in magic items, some enclaves have a reputation for producing goods of a particularly outré nature. One enclave even dallied in limited production warforged.

Your first memories are of the interior of a Red Wizard enclave, where you learned language, basic skills, and the arts of your chosen profession. You were told you had been "commissioned" by a powerful lord of a foreign city-state to serve some secretive role. However, at some point during your indoctrination, you determined that you'd prefer a freer hand. One night, you escaped into the dark, determined to make your own life.

Character Motivations

One or more primary desires might influence you.

On the Lam: Apparently, your commission was quite pricy and required some hard-to-come-by components. Thus your sudden flight ruffled the feathers of not only the enclave where you were forged, but also severely angered the court of the one who paid for your exclusive birth. Thus, although you live a life of freedom, full and glad in your ability to go where you will and do as you wish, every so often you are forced to flee or fight bounty hunters that show up unlooked for and attempt to capture you and return you for "reprocessing." Some day, you know you'll have to deal with the enclave, or better yet, the person responsible for your creation in the first place.

A Business of Your Own: Having "grown up" in the trading compound of the Red Wizard enclave, something of the life must have imparted itself to you. You think you have what it takes to one day become a merchant power. All you require is a little seed capital. Given your situation and the state of the world, adventuring seems the easiest way to attain that end. You're not certain if you'll begin investing your proceeds immediately into a likely looking business that has already started, or if you'll wait until you have sufficient funds to finance the whole endeavor out of the gate.

Roleplaying Option: You are a master of disguise; you are constantly looking into new techniques and wardrobe to further perfect your skills. What started out as a simple precaution against potential Red Wizard bounty hunters looking for "free-willed constructs" has blossomed into something of an obsession. Disguise, sleight of hand, and similar tricks for fooling the senses are amazing to you because of the fact they do not require magic, merely skill, to pull off.

Stranger in a Strange Land

You followed clues and fleeting visions to creep behind the world, which is when you discovered Sigil, the City of Doors. You couldn't imagine who could have created it or how, and Sigil held portals uncounted, leading to other planes and even other worlds. It was a wondrously strange place whose sprawling streets looped around inside a miles-wide ring so they met where they began. Creatures beyond count teemed in those streets, and you were one of them, but only briefly. Out of your element and unsettled by the sudden appearance of a woman bristling with living blades, you stumbled through a strange portal and fell into a strange land.

Character Motivations

One or more primary desires might influence you.

Return to Eberron: Though you were excited to find Sigil and even to travel to Toril, an entirely alternate world to your own dragon-prophesied home, you were dismayed to discover that no easy way back immediately presented itself. When you picked yourself up from the cobbles of a Waterdhavian alley, nothing remained of the passage. It went one way only.

Either because you left someone or something behind in Sigil or Eberron, or because you dislike the idea of being trapped in any one world, your ultimate goal is to find a path back to the world of your birth. To do so, you'll have to spend some time adventuring where old magic once held sway while seeking paths perhaps erased by a shaken cosmology, but you are confident that in the end you will prevail.

Draconic Prophecy: You are a scholar of the draconic Prophecy. You believe that despite your presence in a world that doesn't know the names of the three progenitor dragons, Khyber, Eberron, and Siberys, the draconic Prophecy still holds true! Before you fell to Toril, your research revealed Khyber and Siberys learned of a secret tied to the fate of the universe, and that they fought to control this power. It was on the trail of one of the many shards of this Prophecy that you sought Sigil. Can it be any accident you came to Toril? Of course not! Thus you are content to stay in this world, seeking the Prophecy that illuminates the future, while striving to keep in mind that understanding rarely presents itself while following a single path.

Roleplaying Option: Seeing as much as you have across the face of more than one world, it's all too easy to adopt a world-weary demeanor. Thus when something new catches your attention, you enthusiastically follow it up—sometimes into danger you know you shouldn't discount.

Vestige of Gontal

Gontal hunkers behind its mountainous border in southwestern Returned Abeir. It reveals little of itself to outsiders except for irregular trade that includes specialty commodities, magical elixirs, and sometimes, oddly ornamented golemwork toys. For millennia, a primordial's brooding, metallic fortress sprawled across this land's northern reaches, an area now referred to as the Glaur Barrens. After the fortress detonated, nothing remained but fragments and the occasional piece of strangely animate metallic sculpture.

The first thing you recall is being hauled through metallic tunnels out into bright sunlight on something you later learned was a sledge. You were dragged into the stone stockades of Rimlost on the edges of Glaur Lake. Taken for just another oddity of metallic, stone, and wooden sculpture, salvagers extracted you from some nameless dungeon of the Glaur Barrens. When you begin to move and talk in a language you later learned was outlawed in Returned Abeir (Primordial), you caused quite a stir in the compound. Some there wanted to worship you thinking perhaps you were an envoy of the Primordial whose fortress towered over the region about ninety years ago, and others wanted to destroy you, fearing you were a particularly sneaky anaxim, a kind of golemlike monster commonly encountered in the ruins. You slipped free of the bewildering situation by stowing away on a riverboat heading down the Orlaphar. From Gontal City you joined a trading caravan heading across Esmur Flats into the Dusk Ports. In Tarsith, you learned what it meant to be a living, thinking creature, and that life can be a wondrous if daunting challenge all its own.

Character Motivations

One or more primary desires might influence you.

Get to the Bottom of Things: Every so often, you are attacked, usually when you least expect it. The attack often takes the form of one or more golemlike constructs possessed of a murderous pseudolife, though nothing as sophisticated as consciousness (you tell yourself). Called anaxims, these creatures appear to be random conglomerations of iron, gears, shearing blades, and metallic hides jutting with too many cutting implements and rusted surfaces; they possess none of the humanoid symmetry of your own polished form. Still, you suspect there must be some connection between them and yourself. Why else would these hunting parties, apparently out of the ruins of Gontal, keep finding you? Your choice is to keep running farther and farther afield, perhaps all the way to the new continent of Faerûn that "appeared" across the sea, or to return to the place where your first memories were born, to find out the truth (if any can be had).

Patriot: The land you finally settled in and called your own adopted you, for the most part, with open arms. You know it as your homeland in your heart. Though you might sometimes travel far from it and perhaps only rarely visit, you keep alive the memory of it by adopting its traditions and regaling your companions with its stories (but not to the point of annoyance, one hopes). If your adopted homeland ever has need of you, you'll be the first in line to answer that call.

Roleplaying Option: On more than a few occasions, your trust in others has been betrayed. You've learned to be cautious, and though you cooperate with others and are civil in disagreements, you harbor a spark of suspicion regarding the motives of other people. It is best to be on your guard in a world where most creatures are made purely of flesh and you are not.

Shifters in Toril

Of course, other races not officially described in the Forgotten Realms source material can also be chosen by player characters if DMs allow it, such as shifters. One place naturally suited to shifters is Dambrath because lycanthropy flows in many a Dambrathan's veins. Across the continent, Luruar also serves as an ideal homeland for shifters. In the Glimmerwood, the "skinchanging" People of the Black Blood live with lycanthropy. Though shifters are not lycanthropes, it's not too far a stretch to imagine shifters living in either region.

Playing a Genasi in Eberron

The races of Eberron each have a unified story explaining their presence in the world. But like the occasional warforged player character in Toril, genasi are too rare in Eberron for them to be considered a "native" race. Despite that, players who wish to play genasi in Eberron are free to do so, with their DM's permission. This section describes some likely origin stories for your genasi character.

As a genasi who originated in Eberron, you could be unique or part of a small group. Other creatures in Eberron might sometimes confuse you with rudimentary creatures of the Elemental Chaos. Alone (or perhaps nearly so) in the world, you are forced to find your own truths and weave your own destiny.

Once you choose an origin story for your warforged character, you can work out the fine details of your history with your DM.

Metamorphosis

A citizen of Mror Hold, you were long fascinated with the Fist of Onatar. This active volcano rumbled with magical energy, and its twisting plumes often shrouded the sky over the Ironroot Mountains. The Mror clans guard the site with jealous zeal, but either because you were of that clan or because you slipped past by stealth or diplomacy, you came to caldera and gazed down into a universe of possibility. Some believe the place is sacred and tied to the god Onatar, but you were certain that powerful dragonshards lay beneath the lava, their potency turning stone to molten rock.

Following a map or a dream, you descended the inner caldera. Poisonous gasses, heat, stone, oddly chill winds, and hot geysers assaulted you at every step. But you persisted, certain your destiny was about to be fulfilled. And you were right. When the volcano suddenly erupted, you were pulled up and thrown through the air. You screamed as your skin and muscle burned away, and continued doing so as you felt something new and strange replacing the old with more changeable elemental flesh. You were born anew as a genasi.

Character Motivations

One or more primary desires might influence you.

Agent of the Iron Council: Dwarf lords declared their independence from Karrnath at the first Iron Council, creating the Mror Holds a thousand years ago. To this day, the Iron Council remains a central power in the Mror Holds, overseeing issues that concern all the confederated clans, both locally and outside the nation's borders. Not all the clans get along entirely peacefully, and the secrets and machinations of the Aurum defy reason. As a genasi, you can't help but impress merely by your presence, and one or more members of the Iron Council have tapped you to tackle difficult problems, both diplomatic and dangerous.

Recover the Volcanic Shards: Despite all that's happened to you since your transformation in the caldera of the Fist of Onatar, you still think often and long about the dragonshards you believe lie bubbling below the volcano's magma. You are certain they must be there—potent shards that, even at a distance, transformed you into the genasi you are now. One day, after you've gained more control over the power resident in your body, you know you will return to the Fist and seek those shards. In the meantime, you collect lesser shards, looking for a resonance or clue in them that might explain how you became what you are.

Roleplaying Option: You're something of a dreamer, perhaps a visionary, and you are one to allow for the possibilities that others might dismiss out of hand. No, you're not a blind believer in anything anyone tries to tell you, but you do try to keep an open mind. After all, your own transformation seemed completely unlikely before it happened.

Chaos Voyager

Elements frolic and fight in the Elemental Chaos. Mingling and clashing types of energy take on

aspects of each other– earth swirling like water or floating like air, fire falling like rain, or water frozen ice hard to create a vast plain are commonplace sights. This was the realm from which you sprang.

You and your siblings surfed the storms that roiled across the changeable expanse of the chaos, exulting in their unquenchable energy and the danger attending traveling so near their unpredictable cores. During one such hair-raising voyage you and your siblings goaded each other closer to the wildly spinning eye than you'd ever previously dared. That's when the storm surged. An explosion of light first shook you from your stormboard, then shook consciousness from your frame.

When sense returned to you, you were in a new place. A strangely unchangeable place. A place you learned was called Eberron.

Character Motivations

One or more primary desires might influence you.

Find Your Siblings: When you fell into the world, you lost track of your siblings. None were visible when you finally gained enough of your wits back to look for them. In the months since your arrival, you haven't been able to locate them. You are greatly concerned–you saw them enveloped in the same storm you were. Were they scattered across the face of Eberron like blooming fireseeds in the Chaos? Possibly so. You've heard rumors of a "strange elemental being" briefly sighted in far-flung nations of Khorvaire and beyond. So you travel about, looking for your lost brothers and sisters in a new world.

Explore Eberron: You've come to appreciate Eberron. Though locations do not shift and move about and the weather doesn't include chaos storms on which you can ride for days at a time, the land guards deep and abiding mysteries, some of which have stymied its residents for thousands of years, such as the meaning of the draconic Prophecy. Maybe because you've decided it's time to grow up, or perhaps because you've become enchanted with the strange world into which you fell, you've dedicated the next few years of your life to exploring Eberron and unwrapping with anticipation each new secret the world reveals.

Roleplaying Option: You are more comfortable in the wilderness than in cities. Because of the unpredictable dangers and lack of easy shelter from storms, something in your soul feels more at home in the waving grasslands, the blizzard-shrouded tundra, or swirling dusts of the desert.

Genasi Stranger in a Strange Land

With only a little minor substitution, the warforged in the Stranger in a Strange Land origin works just as well for a genasi in an Eberron origin story, including the first motivation, "Return To . . ."

Escapee from Towers of Arcanix

The Arcane Congress lives within a series of four floating castles, each sited on a rocky earthmote thousands of feet above the fields of Aundair. Each castle is an architectural confusion of several outlandish styles. The towers serve as a college for would-be arcanists, as well as the personal laboratories for some of the most powerful wizards in the Khorvaire. As such, the structures contain wonders undreamed of by most people–from baffling illusions to animated contrivances to captured creatures from other worlds. Such as yourself.

As it stands, you're not certain whether you're an illusion given flesh, a contrivance given soul, or a creature from another world, because your memory prior to your time in the towers is missing. You hope this is because it was erased, not because it didn't exist. Thus, you believe you were a captured being.

Whatever the truth, you grew weary of being on display in one of the several exhibit halls in the Towers of Arcanix. Using a combination of guile, luck, and your elemental abilities, you broke free of your confinement and fled the floating towers.

Character Motivations

One or more primary desires might influence you.

On the Run: When you see a white griffon mount winging through the sky or stabled at a tavern or inn, your heart races. Is it the mount of an Arcane Congress wizard on your trail, hoping to bring you back to the four castles, or an innocent traveler's mount? You usually don't wait to find out–you take off, hoping to lose yourself more thoroughly in the wide landscapes Eberron offers. Perhaps if you traveled all the way to the southern continent of Xen'drik, your pursuers would finally give up? Sometimes you wonder, though: What is it about you that the Arcane Congress is so desperate to have back? Sometimes you are half tempted to return and ask. But, then again, perhaps you should wait to do so only after you've built up your own resources and personal power. That way, if you don't like the answer, you can fight your way free.

On a Mission: You didn't break out of the Floating Towers of Arcanix. Well, at first you thought you did, but lately you've been having disturbing dreams–dreams that suggest that one of the wizards in the floating towers selected you to perform a series of tasks in the world, and arranged to make seem as if you had escaped on your own. The only problem is that the messages in the dreams are vague and hard to recall upon waking. You're not even sure of the name of the wizard whose mission you are supposedly executing, or what the ultimate goal of the mission is meant to accomplish. Can you ever be sure that you are making your own decisions, or is everything you think and do colored by a sort of hidden imperative buried behind your mind? If so, perhaps the adventures you have under-

taken are part of a years-long effort the wizard who arranged your release foresaw. Perhaps . . . or perhaps you merely suffer from bad dreams.

Roleplaying Option: You are uncertain of your own origin, knowing only that you came from an Arcane Congress exhibit. You wonder about your true nature all the time, not knowing if you can trust yourself, or if you are vulnerable to magical control. After all, if you are a made creature, who knows what secret controls underlie your thoughts? At least the warforged know they are made and have been assured of their independence. But what of you? This core worry is the root of your tentative nature.

Seventh King of Graywall

This origin story is reserved for genasi with the earthsoul manifestation.

Along a face of the northernmost peak of the Graywall Mountains stand a testament to the power and grandeur of the Dkhakaani Empire. Relief sculptures over 1,000 feet in height rise from the smooth stone face of the mountain. These images are the Six Kings: hobgoblin warlords who created an empire that once ruled Khorvaire.

For nearly a year, you have greeted goblin pilgrims who have come to the valley below the sculptures to pay their respects to their scions of old. With your earthy flesh and strange markings, you convinced those unschooled creatures that, despite your lack of overt goblinoids features, you are a lingering spirit of the Six Kings and their messenger in the world. You honor the kings' memory by accepting tribute in their name.

This worked well up until recently, when a hobgoblin commander called your bluff and attacked with his force of hundreds. You caused the earth to shake sufficiently violently to knock the commander to his knees, which startled his force long enough for you to escape.

In truth, you are the son of a miner who was "cursed by a spirit of Khyber" according to your good-for-nothing father. You were born out of wedlock, and the "curse" was immediately obvious. You grew up helping your father con merchants out of their coin. Now that your latest swindle has blown up, you are on the lookout for another way to make a living.

Character Motivations

One or more primary desires might influence you.

Traveling King: You liked the sound of the title "Seventh King of Graywall" and you throw it around all the time, especially in areas where people are not familiar with the history of the sculptures on the Graywall Mountains. You claim that you seek a kingdom lost when the world was young—a kingdom stolen from your ancient people by the Dhakaani Empire. Of course, you've made this bit up, having never seen another creature like yourself, but who's to say it's not true? At the very least, looking around the world for evidence to support your claim keeps you on the move, and sometimes you even receive tribute from those who truly hope you might be royalty.

Explorer of Deep Places: What if your good-for-nothing father was right? What if your strange appearance and inborn abilities truly are the result of something your father found or retrieved from Khyber—maybe even you yourself? Regardless, the spaces beneath the earth hold a number of fascinating sites: ruins, caverns, and perhaps even dragonshards.

Roleplaying Option: You are obsessed with items connected to the earth, especially underground areas and lore related to Khyber. Also, any time you use the word Khyber in conversation, people pay attention. So, it's working for you. Perhaps you'll even find a link to your past.

About the Author

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Creature Incarnations: Zombies

By Daniel Marthaler

illustrations by Dave Allsop

ZOMBIES are a timeless staple of the undead. Whether providing a suitable sea of minions for a more cerebral villain or shambling to their own tune, these ambulant corpses are perfect for giving adventurers nightmares. This article details eight new zombies just dying to be unleashed upon your players.

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No Nerves, No Pain

A key feature to using zombies is to keep in mind their lack of a mind. They exist either to serve the whims of the one who animated them or to mindlessly hunt down the living. Survival is not on their agenda. Thus, they become the perfect minions to take hits and attempt suicide missions. Don't hesitate to send your zombies into situations that can mean their destruction if that furthers your villain's maniacal schemes or buys another round or two for more important characters to act or make their escape.

Most zombies are brutes and boast the low AC and plethora of hit points that accompany that role. Hitting and damaging a meaty target, even if it stays up, is more satisfying for all involved than missing a frailer target. When this is coupled with the aforementioned disregard for their own existence, many find that zombies make wonderful front line fighters and distractions. Throwing a few shambling targets into the grinder can help foster a sense of accomplishment without compromising the challenge of the encounter.

The Living Dead

Although an orc with an axe might be just as dangerous to personal safety as a zombie, and even though a human warlord marshaling a host to conquer in the name of Bane is more of a threat to the world at large than a zombie, there is something profoundly disturbing about the undead. Take advantage of this uncanny nature to play on players' fears and predispositions to create memorable encounters with zombies. Atmosphere is king in these situations. An encounter in which the adventurers defeat half a dozen zombies in a nameless field might be perfectly acceptable and mechanically appropriate, but having to fight off the lurching corpses of NPCs that the players have come to know in the gutted remains of a once lively home will be remembered and not just overcome.

Moonlit, fogbound graveyards and necropolises are classic and entirely appropriate settings for encounters with zombies, but nowhere is safe from their decaying touch. The brined corpses of those lost at sea could ravage ports and seaside communities, cadavers preserved by a bog might prey upon nearby settlements or river traffic, or a peaceful farming village could be situated over the long forgotten, but not quite peaceful, site of a cataclysmic battle. Adding just a few details to convey a proper setting or to describe the state of the zombies themselves can take an encounter from just another speed bump to a memorable and engaging story.

Zombie "Features"

Need to make a zombie stand out a bit more? Look no further for inspiration than this table of possible features to make your zombie unique. Choose one from the list or roll a d20. Unless noted, these have no effect and are purely cosmetic.

1. Mangled Leg: One of the zombie's legs has been badly broken at some point, giving it a twisted, stumbling gait even for a zombie.

2. Missing Jaw: The zombie has lost its lower jaw to decay or prior combat.

3. No Hand: One of the zombie's hands has been torn off, leaving a splintered shard of bone protruding from the stump.

4. No Eyes: The zombie's sockets are empty and the ragged holes constantly leak foul fluid.

5. Crushed Skull: The back and one side of the zombie's head have caved in; good thing it wasn't keeping anything of value there.

6. Worm Food: Hundreds of worms and maggots writhe and burrow through the zombie's wet flesh and litter the ground it travels.

7. Bloated: The gasses released by the decomposing zombie are trapped within its form, causing it to swell and blacken beyond recognition.

8. Broken Neck: The zombie's neck has been broken savagely; its head is twisted to one side and lolls aimlessly as the zombie moves.

9. Destroyed Arm: One of the zombie's arms has been torn from its shoulder, leaving a festering, gaping wound.

10. Skeletal: The decomposition is so advanced that only moldering strips of muscle and sinew keep this zombie from crumbling.

11. Death Grimace: This zombie's face is frozen in the last terrible moment of its life before it was murdered.

12. Gaunt: Only a bag of skin and brittle bones, this zombie bears the marks of a hard life and death by starvation.

13. Reinforced: Bits of rotting wood, rusting iron, and dank rope are all that keep this zombie in working order.

14. Cloud of Flies: No doubt attracted by the smell, untold numbers of flies swarm around the zombie and partially obscure different areas of it from view.

15. Hollow: The torso of this zombie has succumbed to rot, spilling its decayed organs and leaving a sickening hole where its stomach should be.

16. Leftovers: The zombie carries bits of a past victim with it as a light snack, perhaps even using an arm or leg as an impromptu club.

17. Ripe: This zombie exudes an unequalled stench that must make even other zombies gag.

18. Battle Tested: Arrows and crossbow bolts are embedded in this zombie, attesting to either a violent death or failed attempts to destroy it.

19. Impaled: A sword or similar object has been stabbed through the chest of this zombie, most likely in a prior attempt to kill the creature. This could make a fine method of planting a magic item for the players to find as treasure.

20. Playing Dead: This zombie masquerades as one of the corpses that litter places adventurers frequent, and it waits until a warm body draws near to reveal itself. A Perception check equal to 15 + half the zombie's level reveals its animated nature.

Charnel Zombie

The same processes that give rise to great cities and monuments invariably also sire throngs of poor, hungry, and unwanted souls barely surviving from day to day. Uncared for in life, these unfortunates receive little better in death. Thrown into burial pits or stacked in mass graves, they are quickly disposed of and forgotten even faster. Not even this pitiful eternal rest is secure, for such a wealth of uncared for remains is a prime target for necromancers and their ilk.

Charnel zombies bear the marks of their former poverty even into undeath. Their bodies are thin and malnourished from constant near starvation. What clothing was not scavenged by other destitute homeless is tattered and worn beyond possible use. Broken and crushed body parts attest that these corpses were dumped into a packed mass grave with little thought given for propriety or the state of the bodies. Their bodies and spirits broken even before being animated as zombies, they seem especially pathetic and vacant.

Charnel Zombie	**Level 10 Minion**
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 125
Initiative +5	**Senses** Perception +5; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion; see also *grasping death*.	
AC 24; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 18	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic	
Speed 4	
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)	
+15 vs. AC; 6 damage.	
⸸ **Grasping Death** (when reduced to 0 hit points)	
The charnel zombie makes a slam attack against a target within its reach.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 17 (+8)	**Dex** 10 (+5) **Wis** 10 (+5)
Con 16 (+8)	**Int** 1 (+0) **Cha** 2 (+0)

Charnel Zombie Tactics

In combat a charnel zombie lunges after the nearest target, and a group of them attempts to swarm a single enemy if the foe happens to be too close to a number of them. A charnel zombie is not intelligent enough to purposefully flank a foe, but it might do so inadvertently if a group of them surrounds a given target. A charnel zombie lashes out with its fists and slams enemies with its body in its mindless and feeble attempts to kill. A charnel zombie fights until destroyed, biting and thrashing about even as it goes down.

Zombie Grave Digger

One of the inconvenient aspects of practicing necromancy is the constant need for raw materials—materials that most other sentient beings find questionable at best. Acquiring the requisite number of bodies is hard, dirty, and time-consuming work hardly fit for even a newly established necromancer. Unfortunately, hired help for this sort of activity is notoriously prone to laziness, and they sometimes gossip at the local tavern or become disloyal. The solution is elegant and practical: zombie grave diggers. These functional servants never tire of wielding cumbersome shovels, never complain about hauling weighty corpses through the dark, and are loyal well past death. Their heavy shovels also serve admirably in turning interlopers into fresh specimens.

Often made from the remains of failed, living grave robbers, zombie grave diggers are dressed in dark-colored work attire, complete with a myriad of hammers, spades, pries, and other accoutrements of their profession. Each also sports a hefty shovel that serves both as the primary tool of the trade and weapon. Everything about them, from their tools to their decaying flesh, is encrusted with dirt and filth from uncounted despoiled graves.

Zombie Grave Digger	**Level 5 Brute**
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 200
Initiative +2	**Senses** Perception +2; darkvision
HP 75; **Bloodied** 37	
AC 17; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 15	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant	
Speed 4	
⊕ **Shovel** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+8 vs. AC; 2d8 + 4 damage.	
⸸ **Dirt in the Eye** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Necrotic**	
+6 vs. Reflex; the target is blinded and takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends both).	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 18 (+6)	**Dex** 10 (+2) **Wis** 10 (+2)
Con 15 (+4)	**Int** 2 (-2) **Cha** 3 (-2)
Equipment shovel	

Zombie Grave Digger Tactics

In combat, a zombie grave digger rushes the nearest enemy and attempts to bludgeon the target into submission with its shovel. Should it find a particular enemy difficult to hit, it flings filth and rotting bits of itself at its foe in an effort to blind its target. However, if the zombie grave digger has been sent out to collect a specific type of body and if one of the interlopers matches that description, it focuses its efforts on bringing that enemy down. If multiple zombie grave diggers are present, one attempts to escape with the body while the others fight a rearguard action. If commanded, a zombie grave digger can use more complicated tactics and, in a pinch, can serve acceptably as an impromptu bodyguard to its master. A zombie grave digger fights until destroyed.

Corpse of Despair

Despair can be a powerful emotion—one capable of overwhelming otherwise ordinary beings and driving them to normally unthinkable acts. Those who succumb to utter hopelessness and end their own lives at

the bleakest point of their depression leave a powerful impression upon their physical remains that can be exploited by necromantic ritual to create a particular type of undead: a corpse of despair. A corpse of despair is unremittingly driven to spread to others the desolation and anguish that caused it to take its own life.

The body animated as a corpse of despair could have hailed from any walk of life, since loss, pain, and despair can darken even the most opulent and powerful lives. However, certain similarities are borne by all. Their faces are masks of anguish and froze at the moment they ended their own existence. Marks of this suicide are still visible upon the zombie; slit wrists, signs of poisoning, and broken necks still bearing nooses are all common. A palpable sense of hopelessness and the futility of life emanates from the pitiful, shambling figures.

Corpse of Despair	**Level 6 Brute**
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 250
Initiative +3	**Senses** Perception +4; darkvision
HP 86; **Bloodied** 43	
AC 18; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 16	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant	
Speed 4	
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)	
+9 vs. AC; 2d8 + 4 damage.	
⸸ **Crushing Despair** (standard; at-will)	
+9 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).	
Death of Hope ✦ Psychic	
A dazed target hit by the corpse of despair also takes ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 19 (+7)	**Dex** 10 (+3) **Wis** 13 (+4)
Con 16 (+6)	**Int** 2 (-1) **Cha** 1 (-2)

Corpse of Despair Tactics

A corpse of despair lumbers into combat, lashing out at whatever target is nearest. It attempts to daze the target first, then slams dazed targets to deal maximum damage and to deal ongoing damage. Once a foe is taking ongoing psychic damage, the corpse of despair attacks the next closest target, beginning the cycle anew. Its goal is to keep as many targets as possible dazed and taking ongoing psychic damage; it uses the appropriate attack against adjacent targets that save from one of these two effects. If all available targets are suffering both, it slams the target it attacked last until any of its victims save against one of the effects. It fights until destroyed.

Lasher Zombie

Despite the progress and expansion of civilization, countless unfortunate souls continue to live with the cruel pangs of hunger. Poverty, famine, disaster, and war all contribute to the tally of lives stolen away by starvation. Its victims suffer horribly as they wither away to pitiful, skeletal caricatures of themselves before finally succumbing. The final, agonizing hunger these poor creatures experience can be imprinted on the corpse they leave behind—a terrible need that lacks only the dark energy of necromancy to rise and gorge itself on an endless feast of warm blood and quivering flesh. Twisted rituals animate and bind these travesties to the will of their creator, who employs them as disturbingly effective guardians or terror weapons. Particularly sadistic villains ensure a constant supply of suitable raw material by abducting captives for no other reason than to let them starve to death.

Lasher zombies, as they are colloquially known, bear the ravished frame and emaciated body of someone who obviously succumbed to starvation. Their flesh has withered and dried, leaving little but skin stretched over brittle bones. The lower torso, however, has swollen and burst open to reveal seemingly healthy organs contained within it. Disturbingly, these exposed organs writhe and pulse with a predatory intent all their own. Glistening ropes of intestine sway to and fro like snakes searching out prey, which is an image chillingly reinforced by the snapping maws adorning each.

Lasher Zombie	**Level 7 Soldier**
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 300
Initiative +5	**Senses** Perception +3; darkvision
HP 80; **Bloodied** 40	
AC 23; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 16	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant	
Speed 4	
⊕ **Viscera Lash** (standard; at-will)	
Reach 2; +12 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is pulled 1 square and grabbed.	
⸸ **Burrowing Entrails** (minor; at-will)	
Grabbed target only; +14 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5.	
Threatening Reach	
The lasher zombie can make opportunity attacks against all enemies within its reach (2 squares).	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 19 (+7)	**Dex** 10 (+3) **Wis** 10 (+3)
Con 16 (+6)	**Int** 2 (-1) **Cha** 1 (-2)

Lasher Zombie Tactics

In combat a lasher zombie positions itself on the frontlines, hoping to grab a soft target that comes too close. It uses its reach to grab at lightly armored foes that move too close to the front while its threatening reach enables it to control the nearby area by ensnaring and pulling to itself anyone who tries to move around it. Normally, the lasher zombie maintains a hold on a single target that has the least Armor Class. A round of immobilization coupled with the attacks of opportunity a target suffers when attempting to move away is enough to curtail most enemies. Whenever possible, it uses any actions not taken up with lashing or maintaining grabs to use *burrowing entrails* on the grabbed foe with the least armor. It abandons grabbed targets by moving only if the opportunity to snare even softer prey appears. It fights until destroyed.

Shambling Nexus

Undead in general are notoriously vulnerable to attacks that employ radiant energy, and zombies, although cheap and easy to animate, are often cumbersome and slow to react on the battlefield. Such problems have long been the bane of aspiring necromantic overlords and have spelled defeat for countless undead, both servant and master. Created to nullify these weaknesses, a shambling nexus is the product of unspeakable rituals that bind enormous quantities of raw, dark energy into a fleshy shell.

A shambling nexus constantly sweats a black, smoking, tarlike substance that accumulates in the wrinkles of its withered form and coats anything it touches. Bubbling tears of pitch stream down its face, leaving smoking trails across its features. This substance is the result of the energy bound into the creature at its creation, which are too much for a mortal corpse to truly contain, so it seeps out in near solid form. The presence of such a concentration of this energy saps the very light from the air, shrouding the nexus with tendrils of shadow. Nearby undead are energized within this aura, becoming faster and stronger, as well as acting with uncommon purpose.

Shambling Nexus	**Level 8 Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 350
Initiative +4	**Senses** Perception +5; darkvision
Tenebrous Aura aura 5; allies that start their turns within the aura lose vulnerability to radiant damage.	
HP 89; **Bloodied** 44	
AC 22; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 19	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant	
Speed 4	
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)	
+13 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 damage.	
Speed of the Dead (standard; at-will)	
One undead ally within 5 squares makes a basic attack with a +2 bonus or moves its speed +2 as a free action.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 17 (+7)	**Dex** 10 (+4) **Wis** 13 (+5)
Con 17 (+7)	**Int** 3 (+0) **Cha** 2 (+0)

Shambling Nexus Tactics:

In combat, a shambling nexus positions itself near, but safely out of, the main battle so that it can offer the protection of its aura to its allies while remaining out of harm's way. It uses its *speed of the dead* power to move allies into tactically opportune positions and to enable others to carry forward the attack. A shambling nexus can utilize relatively complicated battlefield tactics, such as flanking, attacking support characters, and coordinated fire, and it uses its powers to implement them to the best of its abilities. It falls back on its physical attacks only if it is cornered and out of allies, at which point it fights until destroyed.

Flayed Crawler

Created to be vicious trackers and assassins for their necromantic overlords, flayed crawlers are abhorrent abominations animated from the remains of victims sadistically tortured to death. The terrors inflicted upon the poor souls are so extreme that it leaves even their animated corpses unhinged and prone to violent, psychotic outbursts. Regardless of whether they hunt the enemies of their master through the night or stalk the dark places of the world of their own volition, they are driven by an all-consuming desire to inflict the unthinkable pain and terror they endured on others.

The brutalized appearance of a flayed crawler elicits pity, horror, and revulsion in near equal measures. Its skin has been cruelly stripped away to expose the scarred muscle beneath it. The nails on its shattered fingers and toes have been torn out and its tongue and lips removed. Wickedly barbed chains are embedded in its flesh and extend several feet from its arms, serving both as sadistic weapons, and enabling it to cling to sheer surfaces. A continual, silent scream issues from its butchered maw as it follows the movements of the living with open, ruined sockets long devoid of eyes.

Shambling Nexus

Flayed Crawler	Level 9 Lurker
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 400
Initiative +13	**Senses** Perception +10; darkvision
HP 77; **Bloodied** 38	
AC 23; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 19	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant	
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb); see also *impossible bound*	
⊕ **Lash** (standard; at-will)	
+14 vs. AC; 2d6 + 3 damage.	
⸸ **Flaying Strike** (standard, recharge ⚄ ⚅)	
+14 vs. AC; 3d8 + 5 damage, and the target takes 5 ongoing damage and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).	
Impossible Bound (move; recharge ⚄ ⚄ ⚅)	
The flayed crawler can fly 10 squares. It must end its movement either on the ground or by clinging to a surface capable of supporting its weight by using its spider climb.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Skills Stealth +14	
Str 17 (+7)	**Dex** 20 (+9) **Wis** 12 (+5)
Con 17 (+7)	**Int** 3 (+0) **Cha** 1 (-1)

Flayed Crawler Tactics

A flayed crawler sits out the opening rounds of a combat and remains hidden on a high wall or ceiling. Once it has ascertained which of its enemies could be most vulnerable to its attacks, it drops down upon the target and opens with its *flaying strike*, seeking to deal as much damage and pain as possible. The following round it retreats back to safety by leaping to a handy ceiling or wall after attacking with whatever is available. It uses two move actions only if the target seems particularly dangerous or has demonstrated the ability to deny movement with opportunity attacks. Once its abilities have recharged, it begins the cycle anew. A flayed crawler engages in prolonged combat only if cornered with no hope of escape or if it can safely continue to attack a lone, vulnerable target. It is more than willing to abandon a hopeless battle and skulk in the shadows until another opportunity to strike arises.

Plague Fogger

Many virulent and destructive diseases trouble the world, but a dreadful few belong to a category all their own. These plagues can devastate a region, leaving bloated and twisted corpses littering the streets and fields of the blighted area. Such corpses are rife with lethal pestilence and can, through either spontaneous accumulation of fell energy or deliberate action, rise as undead capable of calling on that power. Infused with necrotic energy, these walking sacks of flesh and disease are known as plague foggers. They seek only to spread their horrifying fate to those yet living.

The body of a plague fogger clearly bears the marks of an appalling affliction. Swollen buboes, bands or splotches of discoloration, weeping sores, and all manner of other scars bear testament to an agonizing death. Noxious green vapor continually seeps from the open sores that dot the corpse and trickles from its nose, mouth, and eyes to accumulate in a sickly haze that glistens unwholesomely as it winds around the fogger. This miasma is the manifestation of whatever pestilence claimed the plague fogger and is infused with necrotic energy, enhancing its capability to extinguish life.

Plague Fogger	Level 9 Brute
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 400
Initiative +5	**Senses** Perception +4; darkvision
HP 118; **Bloodied** 59	
AC 21; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant	
Speed 4	
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)	
+12 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage.	
⸸ **Plague Kiss** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**	
+12 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and takes a -2 penalty to Fortitude (save ends both).	
⇙ **Pestilential Breath** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Poison, Necrotic**	
Close blast 5; +10 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 5 poison damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 20 (+9)	**Dex** 12 (+5) **Wis** 10 (+4)
Con 18 (+8)	**Int** 1 (-1) **Cha** 3 (+0)

Lasher Zombie

Plague Fogger

Plague Fogger Tactics

In combat, a plague fogger seeks to inflict the most carnage, preferably with attacks that deal ongoing damage, on as many targets as possible. Its bite, which is infused with the essence of disease and corruption, is its favored attack, since it weakens foes' fortitude and deals ongoing poison damage. A plague fogger falls back on physical slams only when all nearby targets are taking ongoing poison damage already. Once enough enemies are within range, and preferably suffering the effects of a *plague kiss*, it vomits forth a sickening cloud of diseased essence infused with necrotic energy that ravages those unfortunate enough to be caught within it. It never flees its own destruction.

Slavering Maw

Only the most power-hungry, overly confident insane person would construct an abomination known as a slavering maw. Dozens of corpses must be raised through necromantic rituals to serve as obscene construction material. The creature is then given form by stitching together the writhing and thrashing muscle, skin, sinew, and bone of its still animate donor zombies. Rusted iron and rotted wooden scraps are crudely nailed to its flesh and frame to help support its terrible mass. A final, unspeakable ritual fuses the disparate zombies into a single, horrific whole that is far more powerful than its component parts. This newly formed monster suffers from the eternal hunger of every zombie used in its creation, which drives it beyond madness in its need to consume living flesh.

A slavering maw is nearly twice the height and a dozen times the mass of a fully grown human. The roughly sewn skins that serve as its hide are stretched beyond taut by the struggle to contain its

Slavering Maw

horrifically bloated and distended form. Unnaturally massive muscles bunch and coil just below, and they are occasionally visible through rents and tears in its patchwork surface. Its monstrously oversized head is composed mostly of massive, drooling jaws that could swallow a dragonborn whole and are replete with broken shards of bone and jagged, pitted pieces of metal that serve as grisly teeth. In its meaty right fist it grasps an immense, crude, and rusted cleaver. Its left has been hacked off at the wrist. Two corroded yet vicious metal tines the size of spear hafts jut out from the stump, where they are lashed and riveted to the splintered bone.

Slavering Maw	**Level 11 Elite Brute**
Large natural animate (undead)	XP 1,200
Initiative +4	**Senses** Perception +4; darkvision
HP 282; **Bloodied** 141; see also *rupture*	
AC 25; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 20	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant	
Speed 4	
Action Points 1	
⨁ **Cleaver** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+14 vs. AC; 3d6 + 5 damage and the target is pushed 2 squares.	
⨽ **Fork** (standard; at-will)	
+14 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 damage, and the target is grabbed.	
⨽ **Hungering Maw** (standard; grabbed target; at-will)	
The slavering maw attempts to swallow a Medium or smaller creature it is grabbing; +12 vs. Fortitude; the target is swallowed and restrained (escape ends) and takes 10 necrotic damage when it starts its turn swallowed. A swallowed creature can make only melee or close attacks and has line of effect and line of sight only to the slavering maw. Acrobatics and Athletics checks to escape suffer a -5 penalty.	
⨽ **Slavering Fury** (standard; at-will)	
The slavering maw makes a cleaver and a *fork* attack against different targets.	
Rupture (when reduced to 0 hit points)	
Four charnel zombies appear in the slavering maw's space. They take their turn immediately after the slavering maw is reduced to 0 hit points. Swallowed creatures are released into the nearest unoccupied square.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 23 (+11)	**Dex** 8 (+4)	**Wis** 8 (+4)
Con 21 (+10)	**Int** 1 (+0)	**Cha** 2 (+1)
Equipment cleaver	

Slavering Maw Tactics

Driven by an insatiable need to consume living flesh, a slavering maw rushes into the thick of combat at the first sign of a tasty morsel. There it lashes out with an insane fury, smashing aside enemies with its cleaver while attempting to impale others on its fork. As soon as it hits with its fork, it spends its action point to attempt to swallow the grabbed target before it can escape. It moves so that it can affect two targets with its melee attacks, but it cannot use more developed tactics. It fights to the death, at which point it explodes under the strain, freeing its most recent meals.

Encounter Groups

As with the zombies in the *Monster Manual*, the zombies in this article can be encountered just about anywhere. The first party below is a possible grave-digging task force that has a goal to dig up a specific corpse that is in an area that might have guardians. The second group could be assigned to be guardians of a specific item or location.

Level 7 Encounter (XP 1,600)

- ✦ 1 corpse of despair (level 6 brute)
- ✦ 2 lasher zombies (level 7 soldier)
- ✦ 1 shambling nexus (level 8 controller)
- ✦ 2 zombie grave diggers (level 5 brute)

Level 11 Encounter (XP 3,050)

- ✦ 2 charnel zombies (level 10 minion)
- ✦ 2 flayed crawlers (level 9 lurker)
- ✦ 2 plague floggers (level 9 brute)
- ✦ 1 slavering maw (level 11 elite brute)

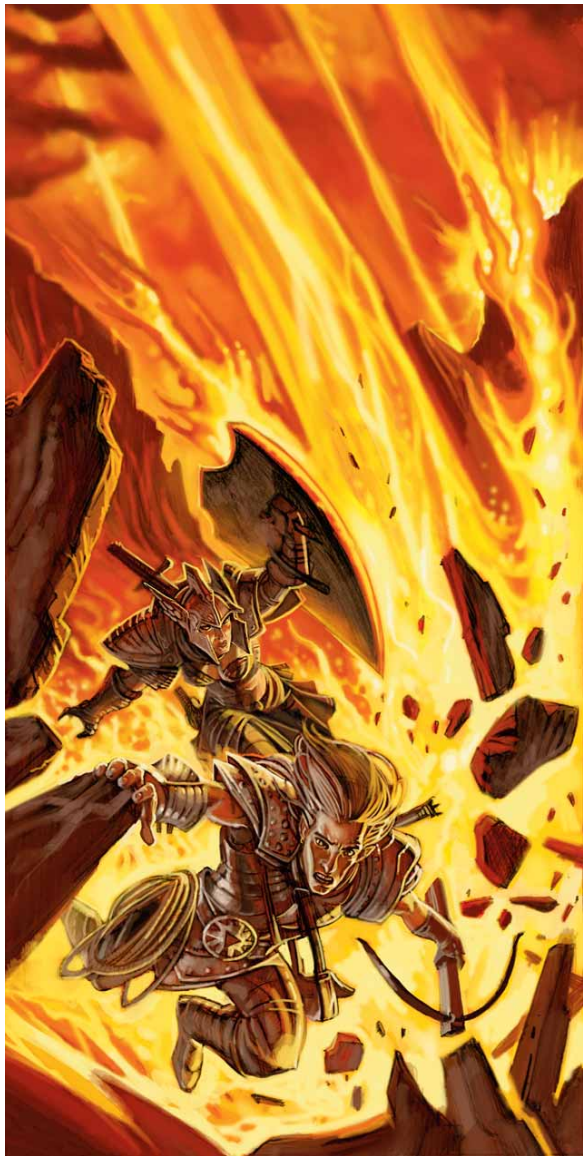
About the Author

Daniel Marthaler is an avid gamer with soaring delusions of grandeur and dreams of breaking into the industry. Despite being 6' 3", he has a peculiar love of the wee races that populate the game, most notably the gnomes and kobolds.

Good Feats!

BY ANDY COLLINS AND JEREMY CRAWFORD

illustration by Steve Ellis



The invention of the feat in 3rd Edition *D&D* marked a major innovation for this venerable roleplaying game. As a small, self-contained mechanical element, the feat provided immense opportunities for characters to differentiate themselves from others of the same class and race. In fact, for some classes, feats offered the only opportunity for that differentiation.

In 4th Edition, feats occupy a narrower area of game design than in the previous edition. They're no longer the default area of power design for fighters, rogues, and the like (now that all classes have their own power lists), so many options that would have been feats in 3rd Edition—Spring Attack and Whirlwind Attack, for instance—are now powers.

How did that shift in game design philosophy manifest in the 4th Edition *Player's Handbook*, and how have feats continued to evolve since their debut in the new game system? 4th Edition co-designer Andy Collins and *Player's Handbook* co-editor Jeremy Crawford explore the answers.

Andy: For quite a while during 4th Edition design, I was pushing for us to re-purpose the word "feats" to refer to the powers used by martial characters. My reasoning was simple: If feats weren't going to include "new things I can do" such as Cleave because those were becoming powers, the name didn't make much sense. Plus, the word fit perfectly as a synonym for "martial powers."

Jesse Decker was the chief (or at least the loudest) proponent of leaving the name to mean what folks knew it meant, and he eventually talked me off the ledge. In hindsight, I completely agree with this decision and have come to use that rationale—be careful when using a familiar name for a new concept—frequently in evaluating new design.

Andy: From the earliest days of 4th Edition design, we knew the new game would include feats (or something very much like them—see sidebar). The customization options offered by these non-class-based mechanical elements were simply too useful to discard, even in a system that assumed all characters had access to a specialized power list.

Jeremy: Many of the feats that ended up in the *Player's Handbook* are translations of feats in the previous edition, including Alertness, Far Shot, Skill Focus, and Toughness. Because of the amount of time we spent bringing these familiar names forward, I don't think we spent enough time exploring the new territory that feats offer in 4th Edition. Since finishing the *Player's Handbook*, we've thankfully been exploring that territory more, as shown in the feats in upcoming books, like *Player's Handbook 2*.

Philosophy of Feats

Andy: The biggest change in design philosophy for feats in 4th Edition was the exclusion of those feats that offered the character entirely new combat options (or in 4th Edition terms, new powers). Everybody thinks of Spring Attack, but I count roughly two dozen feats in the 3E *PH* alone that either grant new powers (Whirlwind Attack, Rapid Shot) or turn an effectively unplayable option into a key tactic (Improved Trip, Two-Weapon Fighting). Over the lifespan of 3rd Edition, this category proved the most exciting one to mine for new ideas. That's hardly surprising, considering that half the

characters in any given party probably relied on feats for most of their "powers."

Jeremy: But while creating feats for 4th Edition, we took this option off the table. Cleave, Manyshot, and other favorites rightfully turned into powers, leaving big shoes to fill in the feat list.

Andy: What seemed a liability early on actually proved useful in focusing our attention on what feats could and should be doing in the new edition of the game—and how to design them well. In a nutshell, we settled on four basic guidelines for feat design, summed up by these questions.

1) Is it easy to understand? This question actually tested the feat in two ways. In addition to the "If I can't understand the feat, I won't take it" issue, we realized that if you need more than a sentence or two to describe the feat's game effect, chances are the effect is too fiddly or corner-case to be worthwhile.

2) Is it easy to use? We knew that feats should not take up as much "brain space" for a player as his or her character's powers. Thus, feats had to be straightforward and simple to apply in the game. That didn't mean that every feat had to be Improved Initiative, but it did mean that we weren't interested in revisiting the "Tactical feat" technology from 3E (which required multi-round tracking of character actions to accomplish certain effects).

While power selection would always remain the primary method of differentiating two characters of the same class, we wanted feats to carry some of that weight as well.

3) Does it create meaningful differences? While power selection would always remain the primary method of differentiating two characters of the same class, we wanted feats to carry some of that weight as well. If a fighter with Power Attack, Armor Proficiency (Plate), Fast Runner, and Powerful Charge didn't feel that those feats made him feel different from another fighter with Blade Opportunist, Distracting Shield, Improved Initiative, and Quick Draw, that'd be a shame.

4) Is it really a power? This secret question lurks at the back of every developer's mind when evaluating new feats. For anyone who played a lot of 3E, it's a hard habit to break, but we do our best to prevent those from seeing print. (Or do we? See sidebar.) By the time we'd finished with the *Player's Handbook* feat list, we found that most of them fell into one or more of four basic categories.

A) Static improvements to character statistics. Durable gives you extra healing surges, and Human Perseverance gives you a bonus to saving throws. Even the armor, shield, and weapon proficiency feats fall into this category, though they dress up the improvements with visual tweaks to your character's appearance. These are the simplest feats to use, since you just modify a stat and never need to worry about the feat again. However, the simple nature of these feats means that there are only so many compelling options.

B) Situational improvements to character statistics. This is an interesting area of game design to explore, as long as you keep the player's sanity in mind. For example, an early version of Defensive Mobility granted its AC bonus only against opportunity attacks caused by movement (a throwback to 3rd Edition's Mobility feat), but we found that technicality not worth the memory required to use it.

C) Modifications to racial powers. The *Player's Handbook* only dabbles in this category, but some of these feats are already among the most compelling in the game. Few dragonborn characters don't consider Enlarged Dragon Breath, and I have yet to meet an elf who didn't pick up Elven Precision pretty quickly. Personally, I like these feats because

FEATS WITH POWERS

Jeremy: Some readers are probably thinking of the many feats that do offer new powers, from the Divinity and Multiclass feats in the *Player's Handbook* to the Bloodline feats that appear in the *Dragon Magazine* article Playing Dhampyr.

Our general guideline for designing this type of feat is that new powers should replace existing powers or be added to a use-one-of-these-per-encounter category of powers (Divinity feats fall into this latter group). This prevents characters from using feats to dramatically increase the number of powers they use in a typical encounter. We want players to have interesting options, but not so many that the game bogs down. As with any design guideline, exceptions exist.

they're straightforward in their effect and almost guaranteed to come up in every encounter. That means the player can understand the feat's value easily and can witness its utility often.

D) Modifications to class features.
These showed up in force in *Martial Power* (and will in future power sourcebooks), but *Player's Handbook* holds some good examples as well, including Improved Misty Step and Inspired Recovery. Like feats that alter racial powers, these feats frequently affect combat because they're based on core elements of your character.

is Fey Charge, which allows an eladrin fighter to expend *fey step* to teleport as part of a charge!

Jeremy: I look forward to us doing more with our uncategorized feats. More than once I've picked feats like Linguist and Ritual Caster for a character, enjoying the options they give in noncombat encounters and the spice they can add to a game world. I'm also happy about the representatives of category B that we've created for *Player's Handbook 2*, feats that are situational but that will see a ton of use. I think my characters have some retraining in their future.

More than once I've picked feats like Linguist and Ritual Caster for a character, enjoying the options they give in noncombat encounters and the spice they can add to a game world.

To be certain, not all the feats in the game fall into these categories: Linguist, for example, doesn't have anything to do with statistics, racial powers, or class features, and Ritual Caster opens up an entirely new category of game effects to a character. Then there are the multiclass feats, which demonstrate how two radically different game concepts—feats and multiclassing—can grow together until the connection seems wholly natural.

Andy: I like categories C and D a lot and used them frequently in designing and developing feats for *Martial Power, Player's Handbook 2, Arcane Power*, and *Divine Power*. I particularly enjoyed combining racial powers with class features or common maneuvers to create feats that answered the question, "Why would I play this class with this race?" One of my favorites

About the Authors

Andy Collins co-designed the 4th Edition *Dungeons & Dragons* game and works for Wizards of the Coast, LLC. as the Manager of Development and Editing for RPG R&D. His credits stretch back a decade and include *Magic Item Compendium, Draconomicon, Unearthed Arcana*, and the *Epic Level Handbook*. Jeremy Crawford is an editor at Wizards of the Coast, who does editing, development, and design for *Dungeons & Dragons*. His recent credits include the *Player's Handbook, Player's Handbook 2, Martial Power*, and *Divine Power*.

Judy and Tom's Excellent Adventure

BY SHELLY MAZZANOBLE
illustrations by William O'Conner

Over Christmas break, I made a horrifying discovery about my parents.

First, let me tell you a little about them. They're nice people in their early sixties. They like shopping, crime dramas, and spending copious amounts of time discussing D&D just so they can work in that bit about their daughter's part-time life as a sorceress. Although they would never stick anything on their bumpers, they are not shy with the proud parent proclamations. These are people who would rank having the twelfth best attendance record in 3rd grade just as pride-worthy as, say, having a book published. And people wonder why I'm a tad delusional?

It started over a lovely breakfast of biscuits, pancakes, and soy bacon when my mom asked if I remembered to bring an extra copy of *Confessions* home for her new neighbors.

"It's their housewarming present," she said. "I told them all about you."

Personally, I thought they'd prefer homemade brownies and some gourmet coffee, but whatever. Not my call.

"Yes, please hurry and give it them," Dad added. "They keep asking *me* how to play."

"What do you tell them?" (My dad probably gets asked this question a lot.)

"I tell them you don't play. You act it out. Like *Whose Line is it Anyway?*"

"Well, we just kind of talk– "

"Like charades," he continued. "But with swords. And dragons."

"And dungeons?"

"I hope not!"

I looked to my mom for assistance. "What do *you* tell people?"

"You get a little figurine, and you move it around the board. If you finish the story first, you win."

And that's when I came to the horrifying discovery:

My parents have never read my book!

"Of course I read it!" Dad said, when I confront them on the topic.

"Uh huh," I said. "Prove it."

"It's a game," he said.

"With a storymaster," Mom added.

"And you have to beat your friends to the prize. Sometimes by killing them."

"Some people like to play alone," my mom said. "On a computer."

If there were two things I always said I loved best about D&D, it was the noncompetitive and social aspects. "You play in a group! And you don't kill your friends!"

"There are winners and there are losers," Dad said. "Don't be a loser."

I didn't know if this was his version of D&D or another one of his metaphors for life, but it was clear what needed to happen.

"You're going to learn how to play D&D," I said. "And I'm going to teach you."

They stared at me. And then at each other. And back to me.

"I'm too old to be crawling around a dungeon," Dad said.

"And I couldn't lift a sword, let alone use one," my mom said. "I don't even like using steak knives."

But it was no use. Guilt is a wonderful thing.

And boy, were they guilty. Mom barely left the kitchen, making all my favorites, including her famous egg salad (even though my dad hates the way the kitchen smells afterward). Dad tried winning me back with Bloomingdale's gift certificates and Nutty Chocolate Chipper cookies from Panera Bread. But their excuses were in vain. I was on a mission, and it led me to the local gaming shop where I picked up a D&D Roleplaying Game Starter Set. I left the box on the kitchen table, the coffee table, their nightstands, and bathroom sinks. D&D was coming for them. They just didn't know when.

I suspected the neighbors didn't get their copy of *Confessions* right away, because suddenly my parents were dropping D&D nuggets into everyday conversation.

"I had the weirdest dream," my mom told me. "Your friend Chris tried to kill me."

"That's weird. Why would Chris want to kill you?" I asked.

"He was a storymaster and I was a little wizard," she said. "You know. Like Astrid."

"Astrid is a sorceress. You know, as in *Confessions of a Part-Time…?*"

"Oh."

And when my dad and I were watching the Giants game he shouted at the screen, "Get a pair of *boots of teleportation*!"

I raised my eyebrows at him. "No you didn't."

"Oh yes," he said, all smug and pretentious. "I did."

Ten days was long enough. Just as Charlie Gibson was getting ready to deliver the nightly news and my parents settled in on their respective couches, I declared it was game time.

"Oh. *Yay*!" Mom said like she was cheering for a root canal.

"I'll do it, but if you write about it, you have to change our names," Dad told me.

"To what?" I asked. "Aunt and Uncle? Everyone knows where I am and who I'm with."

I unloaded the components of the starter set onto the coffee table: tokens, dungeon tiles, dice.

"There are dice involved?" Dad asked.

"Yeah," I sighed. They didn't even know about the *dice*? "But you hardly ever use them."

I began by asking what characters they'd like to play. Dad's arm jutted forward in a weird spasmodic gesture.

"Zorro?" I asked.

Mom answered for him. "He wants to be a pirate."

"Well, he can't. Not today anyway."

This saddened him a great deal. In fact, he looked more dejected than when I told him a serving of cereal was only 3/4 cup. I tried to make it up to him. "How about a rogue? Or a ranger like Walker. You love Chuck Norris!"

"You said this was about fantasies," he said.

"Fine," I said, eager to thwart any possible talk about my dad's fantasies. Let him eat salted beef. "How about a dragonborn paladin who volunteers for a local pirate brigade in his spare time?"

That, along with the noble, driven, born champion description of the character appeased him.

Mom answered without hesitation. "I want to be an ass-kicking little person!"

"Judy!" Dad said. "Don't talk like that in front of your daughter."

"You mean a dwarf?" I asked.

"No," she said firmly. "It is not appropriate to call them that."

As much as I respected her desire to keep her PC as PC as possible, I told her it's okay to call them dwarves in D&D. She plans to talk to R&D about this.

I asked them to get acquainted with their alter egos and show them where to find the stats on their character sheets. Mom immediately had issues.

"4'8", 200 pounds, and low-light vision?" she repeated. "This isn't fantasy! This is me!"

I tried to convince her that she's strong and sturdy and a real looker in the dwarven community, but it's no use. She became a body-dysmorphic, depressed dwarf.

"Make me 6 feet tall."

"If she gets to be 6 feet tall, then I get to be a pirate," my dad said. "Full time."

My parents' attention span is remarkably intolerant for anything not hosted by Howie Mandel or involving a crime scene investigation, so I acquiesced. I didn't want to lose them before they even tossed a die.

"Fine. Mom, you are a freakishly tall dwarf, and dad is a dragonborn pirate. What are your names?"

"Tom?" Dad suggested.

"Oh please," Mom said. "That's not a pirate name."

He settled on Bud while Mom chose Jubunsky because it sounded "dwarfy."

I quickly explained what each line on their character sheet means, but I tell them not to worry about it until the game gets underway. "It will make sense in context."

"Can't we just read your book?" my dad asked.

"Well, you had over a year to do that, so unfortunately you're stuck with a verbal explanation."

To my surprise, neither seemed daunted by the numbers and formulas staring back at them. I made a mental note to congratulate R&D.

Although I fully believe D&D can be great couples therapy, I had no desire to mediate any deep-seated issues my parents might have.

I began the adventure by explaining how they've ended up in a tavern in Harken Village. "You are friends who have been adventuring together for years."

"What if I want to kill her?" Dad asked, which I hope was an in-game reference.

"Don't even try it!" Mom shouted.

Although I fully believe D&D can be great couples therapy, I had no desire to mediate any deep-seated issues my parents might have.

"You love each other very much," I told them. "You've been best friends and partners for 41 years."

My dad rolled his eyes but allowed me to continue.

"You take a break in Harken Village's most popular pub and sup on potato skins and fried ravioli."

"This is how Jubunsky ended up with a BMI of over 44," Mom lamented. "Couldn't we have gone to Subway?"

"Remember it's fantasy," I told them. "Here, fried foods speed up your metabolism. You're actually losing weight while eating."

I saw their eyes brighten. I briefly considered stopping right then, because they clearly loved D&D at that point.

I continued. "An elderly gentleman approaches your table and offers to buy drinks if you'll agree to listen to his woeful tale of plight."

"Rude," my dad said. "We're eating."

"Dear adventurers," I began in my best elderly NPC voice. "Our once serene village is being pillaged by goblins in the dead of night. We simple people of Harken Village cannot take on such creatures ourselves. Please help us."

"Of course we will," Mom said, looking like she's on the verge of tears.

"No way," Dad said. "Tell the good people of Harken Village to put the Giants on TV. I'm staying put."

"Tom," Mom said, "We have to. This is how the game begins!"

"Umm... what part of 'pillaged by goblins' did you not hear? I'm not going out there. It's dangerous. Besides, our potato skins just came."

I wasn't sure what a DM should do when the PCs have no desire to leave the pub. I decided to bribe them.

"Please," I continued as Old Kellar. "You're our only hope. I can offer you 25 gold pieces each."

"But my fried ravioli isn't here yet."

"Get it to go," Mom ordered. "We need to kick some goblin ass."

I set up the dungeon tiles according to the instructions in the rules. I didn't know if it's because I was playing with two blank slates or because I'd done this twice before, but I was actually excited and feeling confident about my DMing skills.

Old Kellar showed them the entrance to the dungeon where the goblins were believed to reside. Mom and Dad placed their tokens in the short corridor leading into the depths of darkness.

"I'm not sure about this," Dad said. "Why don't we just go back and tell the old guy we didn't see anything."

"Oh please," I said. "You won't even let Mom go to Price Chopper by herself, but you'll let her explore a dungeon? What if a goblin steals her purse?"

"I can handle it," Mom said, "Jubunsky wants to fight!" She made *hoo hoo hoo* noises, which I can only assume is her dwarven fight song.

I took that as my sign to continue. "You hear sounds up ahead and see the dim glow of a light." I made what I imagine to be goblinesque noises and both my parents stare.

"Stop it," Dad said.

"Make me."

"Oh, I'll make you!" Jubunsky said, making stabbing gestures in the air.

"I don't like what this is doing to your mother," Dad said. "All this stabbing and killing things?"

"I like it!" Mom said. And threw a d10 at my dad.

"Mom!" Maybe Dad was right. Good thing they didn't know about LARPing. "Sorry," she said. "I was in character."

In effort to evade a black eye, I got back to the game.

"Even if you wanted to leave, it's too late. The goblins see you."

"Uh oh."

"I told you this was a bad idea," Dad said.

"It's time to roll for initiative!"

They had no idea what this meant, but sensed it was important because they both cheered. I explained this was how we determined the combat order.

"Combat?" Dad asked. "What if we just want to talk?"

"Too late," I told him, as my goblins got ready to go first. I moved all three toward the dungeon entrance where Jubunsky and Bud were apparently shaking in their *boots of striding*. "All three throw their javelins at Bud."

"Why me?" Dad shouted. "That's cheating!"

My father would be a great addition to my group back home.

"Does 22 beat your Armor Class?"

"Maybe. Maybe not," he said. "Care to put a wager on it?"

"Tell the truth or you will die instantly."

Mom looked over his shoulder. "He has a 20," she told me. "You're dead."

"What's the spread?" he asked.

"There is no spread," I told him. "It's Dungeons & Dragons, not Vegas & Bookies."

"So he's dead?" Mom asked, eager to get to her turn.

"Not yet." I explained the first number we roll only determined if our attack hit. The next number determined damage. All in all, Bud took 10 points of damage.

"Ouch," he said, making me feel bad. Daughters shouldn't hit their dads with javelins. Maybe I should have given him a spread.

Jubunsky goes next. "So many choices," Mom said, reading over her character sheet. "I'm very talented."

She decided to move up next to the goblins and use *cleave*. Unfortunately, she rolled too low to hit them.

"Your critted, Mom!" Which is kind of a weird thing to say to your mom. Even weirder when she knows what it means.

"Sorry." I made the sounds of giggling goblins, which really pissed her off.

Bud got to go next. "I have a javelin too, so let's see how they like it."

"You know you can use any of those powers on your character sheet? You can even breath fire on them."

"Oh, Tom, do that!" Mom encouraged.

"Why would I want to get *closer* to them?" He asked this with the same incredulous tone as someone asking, "*Why would I want to get a kidney stone?*"

"Because you're a *dragon*," I told him. "*A big, tough dragon*."

"Mind your own business," he yelled at me. "If I go back in the hallway, I can see them but they can't see me. I have a plan!"

"If you come onto the map and take part in the action, you and Mom could flank this goblin and have combat advantage. I explained the benefits of this maneuver, which he poo poo'd, preferring to hide in the hallway and fling javelins at them. He missed.

"Duh," Mom said. Dad sneered at her.

When my goblins went a second time they targeted Bud again.

"That's six more points of damage." The goblins giggled again.

"They're laughing at you, Tom," Mom said. "You should be ashamed."

"I'm injured!" he yelled back. "Leave me alone!"

Jubunsky went next and unlike her overly cautious counterpart, she eagerly plowed through her power list. She loved the visual of her little powerhouse knocking goblins out while performing a shotgun spin, so she chose *spinning sweep*.

"Come on, Jubu!" she said before tossing the d20 on the coffee table. "Mama wants to take out the trash!"

Her encouraging, albeit odd, cheer worked because she rolled a natural 20!

"Your critted, Mom!" Which is kind of a weird thing to say to your mom. Even weirder when she knows what it means.

She pumped her fist in the air and chanted her dwarven fight song, "*Hoo, hoo hoo!*"

"He's dead," I said, removing his token from the playmat.

They high-five. Now Dad appeared to be motivated by Mom's coup. He crept out of the hallway toward a goblin. "I'll do this *radiant smite* thing."

He hit and managed 12 points of damage. "See?" he told us. "I had a plan."

The goblins continued to have their way with Bud, the squishy dragonborn. He dropped all the way down to 8 hit points while Jubunsky maintained a healthy total of 22.

I determined that would be a good time to introduce the two goblin warriors who had been hiding in the shadows. They moved into the action and target Jubunsky.

"You can't just keep bringing out more bad guys," Mom told me.

Funny. This is exactly the kind of thing I would say. Maybe they did read some of *Confessions*.

The warriors went next and targeted Jubunsky, moving on either side of her.

"Damn it, Tom, the goblins are flanking me!" she yelled. "Do something!"

They stabbed Jubunsky with their spears, causing 11 points of damage.

"I'm bloodied!" she screamed. "I don't know what that means but I bet it's bad!"

On her next turn she used her daily, *brute strike*, and ... crits *again*!

"*Hoo, hoo, hoo*!" More high-fives. My mom was dangerously close to beating her fists on her chest and I was sure I'd never recover from the sight. "I'm so good at D&D! Who knew?"

The 39 points of damage she caused easily took out one of the goblin warriors.

"I think she has better powers than I do," Dad said.

"I think you should read your character sheet," I told him.

He did and decided to use his daily power, *paladin's judgment*. He hit and not only took out the remaining goblin warrior, but also allowed Jubunsky to use a healing surge.

She squeezed his hand. "Thank you, honey. I needed that."

They had little trouble taking down the remaining two goblins, especially once Bud decided to come out of the hallway.

We ended the encounter with both parents breathless and smiling like two people who survived a five-on-two goblin attack in a dungeon. I paid them their 25 gold pieces.

"*That* was fun," Mom said. "I would do that for free."

"I still think we should have tried talking to the goblins," my dad said. "It disturbs me that you were so eager to kill everything."

So Mom enjoys the hack-and-slash and Dad likes the roleplaying. This doesn't surprise me. Growing up, Mom was a menace with a wooden spoon, while dad's calm, cool reasoning was like a blast of white dragon's breath.

So Mom enjoys the hack-and-slash and Dad likes the roleplaying. This doesn't surprise me. Growing up, Mom was a menace with a wooden spoon, while dad's calm, cool reasoning was like a blast of white dragon's breath. What does surprise me is that they really did have fun. Again, I'd like to believe this is due to my awesome DM skills, but I suspect it's a bit more organic than that. Stomping on goblins is fun for everyone.

They made D&D a huge part of their lives without even knowing what it was. It may have been a risk to show them, but I think it paid off. If only I could hear the conversation next time someone asks my mom or dad how to play.

A few days later, my mom and I find ourselves with a little free time before dinner so I ask if she wanted to play a game.

"Fine," she said, "but I have to resort to killing you at cards. Your father won't let me play D&D anymore."

Not wanting to come from a broken home, I resisted the urge to tell her about *Three Dragon Ante*. At least until my next vacation home.

Author Bio

Shelly Mazzanoble hopes she can come to your house for Christmas, as her parents disowned her shortly after this column was written.

Open Grave

by Bart Carroll and Steve Winters

Ancient Burial Places; Ancient Tombs; Sorcerous Kings; Challenges, Surpassing (Certain Death); Soul Eaters; Treasure, Great…

Sound familiar? So begin the rumors and legends surrounding the (arguably) most famous dungeon of all, the *Tomb of Horrors*. I'm a huge fan of the original module; I even drive around with a "I Survived the Tomb of Horrors" bumper sticker on my car. To me, the non-stop death march through Acererak's dungeon corridors epitomizes something of the true, albeit sadistic and at times outright arbitrary, spirit of 1st Edition gameplay. This is the module after all, with the following placed in the final treasure vault: "all items from characters teleported nude."

Not everyone thinks so highly of the module, of course. Recently, I lost the Battle of Seattle against editor-in-chief Chris Youngs, debating which adventure module folks would most want to see in 4th Edition. Final result? *Against the Giants* won, 43% to 37% ("other" took the remaining 20%). Although, I contend that if all the giants from the G-series attempted to navigate their way through the *Tomb of Horrors*, they too would be subject to multiple TPKs—thus, a moral victory of sorts.

All that said, *Open Grave* releases this month and so *D&D Alumni* turns its attention to the subject of undeath. Specifically, we look back at a certain lich and demilich that appear in *Open Grave* in order to better explain how these individuals—Acererak and Vecna—came to be included in the Undead Hall of Infamy.

I would argue that liches hold the position of the game's most exalted undead; this, despite competition from animate skeletons, zombies, mummies, and vampires (as well as other horror staples such as golems and lycanthropes). The concept of the lich—a powerful magic-user looking to cheat death through magic—is so very emblematic of the game's sword and sorcery/pulp fiction roots. The lich also makes use of another literary device, that of hiding its "soul" somewhere away from its corporeal body; in myths and stories, including the horcruxes in the *Harry Potter* series, these hiding places can be inside a pinecone, a fish, or, as with Russia's Koschei, inside a needle, which is inside an egg, which is inside a duck, which is inside a rabbit, which is inside an iron chest, which is buried under a tree on island… thus, quite a process to uncover. **D&D** codified these storage devices as a lich's phylactery, for whatever reason seeking the mystical or religious connotations of a traditional Jewish device, at least in name … and adventurers have been searching for them ever since.

Vecna

Seldom is the name of Vecna spoken except in hushed voice, and never within hearing of strangers, for legends say that the phantom of this once supreme lich still rooms the Material Plane. It is certain that when Vecna finally met his doom, one eye and one hand survived. The arch-lich Vecna supposedly imbued both his hand (left) and his eye with wondrous and horrible powers enabling them to persist long after his other remains moldered away into dust.

While Vecna's first iteration was solely through his eye and hand (all that remained of him after being destroyed in battle), he progressed throughout the editions from arch-lich all the way to god of undeath. But why, it must be asked, did his eye and hand remain? Something of his story, no doubt, owes to the game's literary influences (not to mention his very name, anagram of Jack Vance).

The *Eye* and *Hand of Vecna* owe much of their inspiration to Michael Moorcock's first trilogy of short novels on the eternal hero Corum: *The Knight of the Swords*, *The Queen of the Swords*, and *The King of the Swords*. Corum is the last survivor of his race, a vaguely elf/sidhe-like people who were hunted down and butchered by the humans. Corum himself is captured by humans, whose idea of fun is gouging out his left eye and chopping off his left hand. Corum escapes before they can finish him off and survives with the help of a different (and much kinder) group of humans.

Before long, Corum meets a sorcerer who gives him two gifts: the Hand of Kwll and the Eye of Rhynn. These two artifacts didn't come from a single, mad lich, but from a pair of brother gods. Kwll and Rhynn themselves aren't good or evil, lawful or chaotic—they exist beyond the notions of petty, human morality. The eye expands Corum's senses and lets him see into other planes. The hand has great strength and stamina, but more importantly, it allows Corum to summon creatures from the planes that the eye sees into. Those creatures come to Corum's aid, which generally means killing whatever threatens him at the moment. Those creatures are then released from bondage and the souls of whatever they just killed are placed at Corum's service and must answer the summons the next time he needs aid.

Much of the time, these two artifacts work in Corum's best interest… but not always. They aren't entirely under Corum's control. The eye shows him things he'd rather not see, the hand attacks people he'd rather not fight, and

Artifact Powers

1st Edition artifacts were quite the collection of overpowered items; as evidence to this claim, following is the table of prime powers from the 1st Edition *DMG*, provided to the *Hand* (two such powers) and *Eye* (one power)... in addition to also having minor and major benign powers! That said, these powers did come with a price (beyond the relentless campaign for evil): Minor and major malevolent effects as well as extremely unfortunate side effects (including lycanthropy, a Charisma score of 3, or the inability to touch or be touched by any metal object).

TABLE V: PRIME POWERS

A. All of possessor's ability totals permanently raised 2 points each upon pronouncement of a command word (18 maximum)
B. All of possessor's ability totals raised to 18 each upon pronouncement of a command word
C. Bones/exoskeleton/cartilage of opponent turned to jelly–1 time/day
D. Cacodemon-like power summons a demon lord, arch-devil, or nycadaemon–1 time/month
E. *Creeping doom* callable- 1 time/day
F. Death ray equal to a *finger of death* with no saving throw–1 time/day
G. *Death* spell power of 110%-200% effectiveness with respect to number of levels affected–1 time/day
H. *Gate* spell power, 100% effective–1 time/day
I. *Imprisonment* spell power–1 time/week
J. Magical resistance of 50%-75% for possessor upon command word–1 time/day
K. Major attribute permanently raised to 19 upon command word
L. *Meteorswarm*–1 time/day
M. *Monster summoning VIII*–2 times/day
N. *Plane shift*–1 time/day
O. *Polymorph any object*–1 time/day
P. *Power word blind/kill/stun*–1 time/day
Q. Premonition of death or serious harm to possessor
R. *Prismatic spray*–1 time/day
S. *Restoration*–1 time/day
T. *Resurrection*–7 times/week
U. *Shades*–2 times/day
V. *Shape change*–2 times/day
W. Spell absorption, 19-24 levels–1 time/week
X. Summon 1 of each type of elemental, 16 hit dice each, no need for control–1 time/week
Y. Summon djinn or efreet lord (8 h.p./die, f 2 "to hit" and +4 damage) for 1 day of service–1 time/week
Z. Super *sleep* spell affects double the number of creatures plus up to 2 5th or 6th and 1 7th or 8th level creature
AA. *Temporal stasis*, no saving throw, upon touch–1 time/month
BB. The item enables the possessor to *legend lore*, *commune*, or *contact higher plane* (7th-10th)–1 time/week
CC. *Time stop* of twice normal duration–1 time/week
DD. Total fire/heat resistance for all creatures within 20' of the item
EE. Total immunity from all forms of mental and psionic attacks
FF. Total immunity from all forms of cold
GG. *Trap the soul* with 90% effectiveness–1 time/month
HH. User can cast combination spells (if a spell caster) as follows (d4):
1) 1st and 2nd level spells simultaneously
2) 2nd and 3rd level spells simultaneously
3) 3rd and 4th level spells simultaneously
4) 1st, 2nd, and 3rd level spells simultaneously
II. *Vanish*–2 times/day
JJ. *Vision*–1 time/day
KK. *Wish*–1 time/day
LL. Youth restored to creature touched–1 time/month

the summoned creatures kill people he'd rather weren't dead. They never turn Corum to evil, but they cause him to do many evil things, and those sins torture his conscience. From his perspective, they're both a blessing and a curse, with the curse-half constantly gaining traction over the blessing-half.

Eventually, he meets the god Kwll, who is imprisoned until he can be reunited with his hand. Corum offers the hand to Kwll and the eye to Rhynn in exchange for their aid against the most powerful of the chaos gods. Kwll agrees, but once the hand is returned and Kwll is freed, he declares that gods are not bound by agreements with mortals. In the end, he and his brother help Corum anyway, but because they chose to, not because Corum forced a bargain from them. The world is freed from the clutches of the warring gods of law and chaos and Corum is rid of the eye and hand, which he considers a triple win.

With that background, here's how the *Eye* and *Hand of Vecna* were described in their original appearance:

***Eye of Vecna*:** The *Eye of Vecna* is said to glow in the same manner as that of a feral creature. It appears to be an agate until it is placed in an empty eye socket of a living character. Once pressed in, it instantly and irrevocably grafts itself to the head, and it cannot be removed or harmed without slaying the character.

***The Hand of Vecna*:** Tales say that the *Hand* appears to be a mummified extremity, a blackened and shriveled hand, possibly from a burned body. If the wrist portion is pressed against the stump of a forearm, it will instantly graft itself to the limb and become a functioning member with 18/00 strength in its grip (no "to hit" or damage bonuses). The *Hand* will eventually turn the alignment of the host character to neutral evil.

To use any power, the fingers of the *Hand* must be extended, curled, or whatever in different combinations. Devise the combinations of finger/hand positions you have assigned to each power and record them, i.e. fist =

( ), thumb down = ( ), pointing little finger = ( ), etc. Keep this chart handy and make the host character use the positions to use a power of the Hand.

Note: From his artifacts to the arch-lich himself, Vecna later appeared in such game material as 2nd Edition's *Vecna Lives!*, *Vecna Reborn*, and—in the appendix to *Die Vecna Die!*—statted out as "The Maimed God" (or demigod, to be precise). This version of the *Eye of Vecna* still appeared as a black, uncut gem, and the *Hand* possessed a new, more specified suite of powers made in conjunction with its gestures, including:

✦ Point index finger: *light*, at will; to Point five fingers: *disintegrate*, 1/day

✦ Palm out: *time stop*, 1/day

✦ Snap fingers: *monster summoning IV*, 3/day

The host character may use any minor power without fear, but as soon as a major power of the *Hand* is used, he or she awakes a spirit of great evil. (You, the DM, should then begin an insidious campaign of suggestion and urging towards evil on that character's part.) When a primary power is used, the host will instantly become neutral evil—very evil. The *Hand* can be severed from the host at any time before its powers are used with 100% certainty, but each major power use subtracts 1% from the probability, and each use of a primary power makes success 10% less likely. Whenever 100% subtraction has occurred there is no possibility of removing the *Hand*, and the character will know this.

Acererak

Somewhere under a lost and lonely hill of grim and foreboding aspect lies a labyrinthine crypt. It is filled with terrible traps and not a few strange and ferocious monsters to slay the unwary. It is filled with rich treasures both precious and magical, but in addition to the aforementioned guardians, there is said to be a demi-lich who still wards his final haunt. (Be warned that tales told have it that this being possesses powers which make him nearly undefeatable!) Accounts relate that it is quite unlikely that any adventurers will ever find the chamber where the demilich Acererak lingers, for the passages and rooms of the Tomb are fraught with terrible traps, poison gases, and magical protections. Furthermore, the demi-lich has so well hidden his lair, that even those who avoid the pitfalls will not be likely to locate their true goal. So only large and well-prepared parties of the bravest and strongest should even consider the attempt, and if they do locate the Tomb, they must be prepared to fail. Any expedition must be composed of characters of high level and varied class. They must have magical protections and weapons, and equip themselves with every sort of device possible to insure their survival.

Next, we look back at the game's most famous demilich. Acererak had connections to Vecna as well, rumored to have served and even saved his lich master before becoming a lich himself. And from lich, Acererak went on, not to godhood, but to become the game's first demilich—in many ways, a far more dangerous creature, the final vestige of a once all-powerful lich.

Like Vecna, one can find the inspirations for Acererak in early swords-and-sorcery fiction. Probably the most influential in this regard was Clark Ashton Smith, a contemporary of H. P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard. Smith's story *The Death of Malygris* relates the tale of an "archimage" whose power terrifies a kingdom even though the necromancer hasn't stirred in decades:

"I have seen Malygris," he said, turning to the conclave. "Many times I have watched him thus, thinking to learn some secret of his close-hidden magic, I have spied upon him at noon, at evenfall, and through the drear, lampless vigils of midnight. And I have beheld him in the ashen dawn and the dawn of quickening fire. But always he sits in the great ivory chair, in the high hall of his tower, frowning as if with meditation. And his hands clutch always the basilisk-carven arms of the chair, and his eyes turn evermore, unshutting, unblinking, toward the orient window and the heavens beyond where only high-risen stars and clouds go by.

"Thus have I beheld him for the space of a whole year and a month. And each day I have seen his monsters bring before him vessels filled with rare meat and drink: and later they have taken away the vessels untouched. And never have I discerned the least movement of his lips, nor any turning or tremor of his body.

"For these reasons, I deem that Malygris is dead; but by virtue of his supremacy in evil and in art magical, he sits defying the worm, still undecayed and incorrupt. And his monsters and his familiars attend him still, deceived by the lying appearance of life; and his power, though now an empty fraud, is still dark and awful upon Poseidonis."

Needless to say, when humans enter Malygris's tower to steal his secrets and loot his treasures, they're met by a doom that surpasses horror.

Who better, we thought, to ask about Acererak than Bruce Cordell, creator of the *Return to the Tomb of Horrors* as well as the 3.5 revision to the original adventure—starting with, what led to his interest in Acererak? And so we did...

Ages past, a human magic-user/cleric of surpassing evil took the steps necessary to preserve his life force beyond the centuries he had already lived, and this creature became the lich, Acererak. Over the scores of years which followed, the lich dwelled with hordes of ghastly servants in the gloomy stone halls of the very hill where the Tomb is. Eventually even the undead life force of Acererak began to wane, so for the next eight decades, the lich's servants labored to create the Tomb of Horrors. Then Acererak destroyed all of his slaves and servitors, magically hid the entrance to his halls, and went to his final haunt, while his soul roamed strange planes unknown to even the wisest of sages.

Bruce: The first time I played *Tomb of Horrors* (DMed by Monte Cook when we were 13) was so fun (and odd, and actually scary at one point) that it made a big impression. It also had a "show the player this picture" section which greatly added to the ambience--one of the first, if not the first, modules to do so. I later DMed it for various different groups myself, enjoying it immensely each time. It's a dungeon of traps, but it doesn't go on so long that adventuring through it becomes frustrating.

For those that might not remember the bizarre end-game against Acererak, he could be harmed in only the following ways:

- ✦ A *forget* spell will force the skull to sink down without taking away a soul.
- ✦ Each *shatter* spell thrown at it inflicts 10 hp of damage.
- ✦ A *power word, kill* pronounced from an astral or ethereal magic-user will destroy it.
- ✦ Only a fighter with a *vorpal* blade, a ranger with a *sword of sharpness*, +5, or *vorpal* weapon, or a paladin with the like or even a +4 weapon can inflict damage upon the skull.
- ✦ An *exorcise* spell will cause it to sink as a *forget* does.
- ✦ A *dispel evil* spell inflicts 5 h.p. of damage.
- ✦ A *holy word* pronounced against it will inflict 20 h.p. of damage.
- ✦ A thief slinging one of the large gems found in the crypt will inflict 1 h.p. of damage per 10,000 g.p. of value, i.e. 1, 5, o r 10 h.p. damage, but the gem is thereby shattered and even misses must be saved for versus a crushing blow or the gem is shattered from hitting a crypt wall.

Q: The original Acererak was almost more of a hazard than a monster; any thoughts on the bizarre ways to damage him in the past vs. the current mechanics of the game?

Bruce: That's funny because when I first played, then DMed this module, I didn't think of it as bizarre--I just accepted it. Probably because I was 13 and what wasn't bizarre to me then? I could guess because I don't know how these particular ways to harm the skull in the original *Tomb of Horrors* came to be, but perhaps these are what the players in Gary's game first did, trying anything to hurt this monster he put at the end of his dungeon, and afterward he hardcoded what they had done into the module. But, as I said, that's a guess.

Q: How did you develop the concept of a demilich over time?

Bruce: Many people helped develop it over time. In *Return to the Tomb of Horrors* (a 2nd Edition product) I postulated the original skull was actually a construct that an actual (more powerful) demilich created to serve as the keystone of his horrific tomb. That distinction was lost in *Epic Level Handbook* (a 3rd Edition product) or at least not touched on. However, in *Open Grave* (yes, a 4th Edition D&D product), I propose a similar set of creatures--construct and actual demilich.

Q: When creating *Return to the Tomb of Horrors*, what did you develop about Acererak from his original appearance in *Tomb of Horrors* and why?

Bruce: I developed an entire backstory for Acererak that wasn't included the original *Tomb of Horrors* by Gary Gygax for two reasons. One, *Return to the Tomb of Horrors* was a boxed set and I had room to do so, and two, because discovering Acererak's backstory and future plans set the stage for all that occurred in *RtToH*. I developed his origins as a persecuted tiefling child to his development as a wizard and priest of Orcus, to his creation of his tomb that was actually a test to winnow souls, to his final Fortress of Conclusion. The wording in the original *Tomb*, "(...) his soul roamed strange planes unknown to even the wisest of sages," is what gave me leeway to create the City of Moil and his Fortress of Conclusion where he hoped to... well, see below.

Q: Those "strange planes" then became the Negative Energy Plane. What was Acererak's connection to this plane altered over time?

Bruce: Acererak was performing a years long ritual whose components included a critical number of reaped souls. When the ritual was complete, he would become one with the Negative Energy Plane and gain a connection with undead everywhere. Now, with the updated cosmology of 4th Edition **D&D**, I imagine the Fortress of Conclusion might well sit somewhere in the Shadowfell, as Moil does.

Q: In 3rd Edition, Acererak did not exactly make a triumphant reappearance. A construct version existed in the *Tomb of Horrors* revision, while other references to him (such as the *Prison of Castle Perilous* adventure) in fact stated that his tomb had, in effect, been solved and Acererak defeated. In *Tome of Magic*, he appears merely as a vestige....

Bruce: I suppose it was in homage to Acererak, with the feeling that he hadn't succeeded in what he had attempted in *RtToH*. In 4th Edition, he's not a vestige.

Q: So Acererak has returned?

Bruce: Acererak will appear in *Open Grave*, and Moil is described in *Manual of the Planes*.

The False Demilich Trap

As a final tribute to Acererak and the spirit (no pun intended) of the original *Tomb of Horrors*, we offer the following new trap. The original Acererak could only

be defeated through a bizarre hodgepodge of ways; and so in the following trap, a false demilich can be employed to guard over a treasure vault against players who perhaps enjoy a riddle or puzzle as much as a combat encounter and are no strangers to finding success through experimentation. Are the countermeasures obscure? Most certainly. Are they fair? Well, *Tomb of Horrors* seemed never intended to be fair... at least, so far as its survivors have commonly judged.

As a DM, feel free to add your own countermeasures (an ethereal or astral magic-user casting power word kill can not exactly be recreated at present time) to the list below. As for the players puzzling them out, you might warn them in advance about rumors of the demilich, with a Consult Mystic Sages or Consult Oracle ritual, or sufficiently high skill check, revealing one known countermeasure per success ahead of time. You might also place appropriate magic items to help along the way or in the vault itself; the original version conveniently had three sufficiently valued gems in the vault for a cunning (or desperate) thief to sling. Alternatively, as Bruce points out above, which came first—player experimentation or the preset means of defeating Acererak? Instead of predetermining the countermeasures, you might also allow for partial success based on the creativity of your players' attempts (not that this doesn't make good advice in most circumstances).

False Demilich **Level 26 Solo Blaster**
Trap XP 45,000

A pile of dust and bones rises into the air, shaping into a roughly humanoid form; a skull atop the form—set with rubies for eyes and pointed diamonds for teeth—slowly scans all those before it.

Trap: This jewel-studded skull is often placed within the center of a treasure vault, disguised as part of its riches. When a creature steps within 5 squares of the false demilich, it rises into the air and starts draining souls into its *soul gems*.

Perception
✦ DC 25: The character spots the jewel-studded skull.
Additional Skill: Religion
✦ DC 31: The character knows of demiliches: an animated skull festooned with costly gems, which gleam wickedly with the light of trapped souls. Despite the implication of its name, a demilich is more deadly than a normal lich.
Additional Skills: Arcana, Thievery
✦ DC 34: The character recognizes the skull as a false demilich, understanding that it make use of a demilich's soul gems.
Initiative +13

Trigger
When a creature moves within 5 squares of the false demilich, it rolls initiative and attacks.

Attack
Standard Action
Ranged 5
Target: One creature, preferentially targeting an arcane, primal, martial, or divine character (in that order), or any character that last caused it damage.
Attack: +25 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The target is dazed and restrained (save ends both). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is instead stunned and restrained (save ends both). *Second Failed Saving Throw:* The target dies, their physical body collapses in a mass of corruption and molders away, and its soul is trapped in one of the false demilich's *soul gems* until the false demilich is destroyed; see also the "Fate of Drained Souls" sidebar (*Open Grave* pg. 201).
Special: The false demilich's six *soul gems* can each hold the soul of one of its victims. When the false demilich is destroyed, each *soul gem* must succeed on a saving throw or be destroyed as well (along with the soul it contains). Crushing a surviving *soul gem* after the false demilich is destroyed releases the soul to a material body within 2 squares, if one is available to receive it (a simulacrum, a clone, or a soulless body of some sort), or else the soul is released into the Shadowfell. Surviving *gems* can be recovered: the two jewels set into the eye sockets (5,000 gp rubies), and its *soul gems*, 6 pointed (marquis cut) diamonds set as teeth in the jaw (each diamond worth 500 gp).

Countermeasures
A character might attack the false demilich (AC 33, other defenses 32; hp 50), but only certain specific actions will affect it, as follows:
✦ A martial character using a *vorpal* weapon or a sword drawn from a *sapphire scabbard*, a paladin using a +4 or better magic weapon, or any character using a *holy avenger* can attack the false demilich and inflict damage as normal on a successful hit.
✦ A rogue using a gem (including astral diamonds) as a sling stone inflicts 1 damage per 10,000 gp value of the stone on a successful hit. On a hit, the gem shatters. On a miss, the gem must succeed on a saving throw, also shattering on failure.
✦ Successful use of the following items or powers do not cause damage as normal but instead inflict 5 damage to the false demilich: warlock's *eyebite*, cleric's *sacred word*, an item or power with the thunder keyword, or an item or power with both the divine and radiant keywords.
✦ Successful use of a cleric's *command* or *purify*, a wizard's *confusion*, or a *ring of forgetful touch* will cause the false demilich to sink down without attacking. It can still be triggered again as normal.

About the Authors

Bart Carroll is loathsome beyond description and has no redeeming features. His body resembles that of a huge, bloated buffalo and gives off an offensive odor. The author's neck is long and thin, and perched atop it is a big head uglier than that of a warthog. His legs are thick and stumpy, much like a hippopotamus. The author's tail is strong and snakey, however, and moves with amazing swiftness to strike enemies.

Steve Winter is a writer, game designer, and web producer living in the Seattle area. He's been involved with publishing ***D&D*** in one form or another since 1981. Tiny people and monsters made of plastic and lead are among his favorite obsessions.

Leaping Into the New Year

There's Excitement on the Horizon

BY CHRIS TULACH

illustrations by Eric L. Williams

2008 has come and gone, and the next few months look to be pretty busy around here at Organized Play. Here's what's on tap for the near future; for more information on all of our upcoming projects, visit the RPGA website at www.wizards.com/rpga.

DM Rewards

Since 2003, the RPGA has offered a Rewards program for its membership. You'd sign up, play or DM some games, and get swag. We traditionally offered alternate paint minis for DMs and Rewards cards (a cardstock dollar-bill-sized card that unlocked campaign options or gave your character a little edge at RPGA games) for both players and DMs. While this program worked pretty well for us, we decided to revamp it after some careful consideration.

We decided, after long discussions, that we'd focus our efforts for the new program on DMs. A good DM is hard to find, and they put in a lot of work to entertain a group for hours. We felt that they needed a boost in the utility and function of their rewards. At the same time, we recognized that the players were satisfied with their existing reward, the Rewards cards, but we wanted to make the cards a little more available than they currently are. In the RPGA, a very large majority of the players signed up for our Rewards program do DM games with some degree of frequency, so we made the decision to meld our player and DM programs into one program with the emphasis on DMs.

At the beginning of this year, we converted the old *D&D* Rewards program to the DM Rewards program. All existing members of the old system are automatically enrolled in the new one. You get rewarded for two things in the new program: keeping your contact information current and DMing games. It's pretty simple. Just for being a part of the program, you receive a new, high-quality, full

adventure created specifically for the DM Rewards program each year. In addition, if you DM and report five games during a six-month cycle, you'll get mailed another bit of swag. We're going to change up what you'll receive often, so you'll never get tired of the same old sorts of rewards. We're looking at giving DMs something that they can actually use either at their game table or while prepping for their game—stuff like exclusive *Dungeon Tiles*, special artwork binders, full-color poster maps of cool encounter areas, and exclusive monsters or traps.

But we're not getting rid of the cards. Instead, we're sort of killing two birds with one stone. You see, conventions have been asking for different means of support over the past few years, and while there are still other plans in the works, we decided to offer the Rewards cards through our convention support program. Starting in March, organizers with a show that purchases an RPG prize support pack will receive 20 Rewards cards for each pack purchased. The organizer can distribute the cards to the show attendees. If you're not a convention-goer but you want your cards, you can still get all the cards the easy way—we'll periodically put up a locked PDF with images of all the cards that were distributed to the shows, printable and legal for use in RPGA games. As long as you're part of the DM Rewards program, you'll receive a password to unlock the file, and you're all set!

Now is a great time to take advantage of the new program and get behind the DM screen a little more often. If you know someone that hasn't taken the plunge into DMing yet, give that player a little nudge, and they might just thank you for it down the road.

Winter Conventions

I'll be at our two back-to-back shows in late January and early February, where we'll be showing off some of our upcoming products and have some great game offerings. First off, *D&D Experience* takes place in Fort Wayne, Indiana from January 29 to February 1. As usual, we'll have bunches of the latest RPGA adventures to play, product previews, and access to Wizards R&D staff. This year, however, we're also expanding our seminar schedule, giving attendees a new one each day. The seminars will range in topics from adventure design to product Q&A and will be hosted by Wizards staff. Look for lots of great, hands-on information about *Player's Handbook 2* at the show.

At New York Comic Con (running February 6-8), Wizards will be attending the East Coast's largest comic-themed show, and we'll have a separate gaming hall just for our games. Wizards R&D staff will be there to run games and give sneak peeks at the new products. We're featuring a Mystery Dungeon Challenge event on Saturday night, which gives DMs a chance to show off what they can do with their own 4th Edition adventures.

If you're in the gaming hall at either of these shows, be sure to stop and say hello. As long as I'm not running around on fire, feel free to bend my ear for a few minutes.

2009 Game Days

That's right, this year it's game *days*—we're doing at least three, based around the release of the "twos"—*Player's Handbook 2*, *Monster Manual 2*, and *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*. The first one, *Player's Handbook 2*, is coming up quick. We'll give you a brand-new paragon tier adventure to play and 11th-level characters using options from *Player's Handbook 2* (and other upcoming books); just bring yourself and some dice to get in on the action! Mark your calendars for March 21, and make sure that you check with your local play spot to ensure they sign up to participate. More information on this and the other game day events later in the year will be posted on the *RPGA site* in February.

About the Author

Originally thought to have been raised from a humble Midwestern family, **Chris Tulach** actually fell to Earth in a meteorite-shaped capsule flung from a planet far outside our galaxy. While under the yellow rays of Sol, Chris's nerdity far surpasses that of any normal human. Using this precious gift only for good, he has become the RPGA Content Designer, responsible for the development and deployment of Dungeons & Dragons® organized play programs.

Looking Ahead

by Bill Slavicsek

In this edition of "&," we're going to imagine what 2009 might bring as far as Dungeons & Dragons is concerned, and we'll get a sneak peek at a project that I'm working on, namely *E1: Death's Reach*.

Happy New Year! Can you believe it's 2009? Wow. When I was growing up and first getting into D&D, the 2000s were so far away. They were science fiction! Now, here we are, living in the future. I've got just one question: Where's our hover cars? Well, actually, I'm glad we don't have hover cars yet. Judging by the way the rest of you drive, we're not quite ready for them. Maybe some day...

But we are ready for a look ahead. What will 2009 bring for *D&D Insider* and the Dungeons & Dragons brand? I'm here to let you in on a few secrets and to give you some inside information. Straight from the R&D Director's chair, as it were.

2009: Year of the 2s

The upcoming year revolves around our core rules expansions. In March, *Player's Handbook 2* hits the shelves. If you've been following the previews here at *D&D Insider*, then you know that this volume expands the material for D&D players by adding the primal power source and providing new classes, including the barbarian, bard, druid, and shaman. Everyone around the office is excited and thrilled by this book. It really shows the promise and potential of the new rules set.

In May, look for *Monster Manual 2*, which adds an amazing collection of new creatures and old favorites into your encounter-building arsenal.

In September, *Dungeon Master's Guide 2* provides an array of new material for DMs, including updated skill challenge rules, more traps and hazards, lots of information for crafting and running paragon-tier adventures, and a paragon-tier city that you can drop into any D&D campaign. What city? None other than Sigil, City of Doors! What better locale to launch your paragon-tier adventures from than the city that connects to everywhere? We have a lot of respect and fond memories of Planescape and Sigil, and a number of us still in the department worked on that setting back in the day (myself included). So it is with great pride and enthusiasm that I announce the return of Sigil to the core of Dungeons & Dragons. I can't wait for you to see the place! This section alone makes *Dungeon Master's Guide 2* a great product, but it's only the icing on the cake. We'll talk more in future columns.

In September, Dungeon Master's Guide 2 provides an array of new material for DMs, including updated skill challenge rules, more traps and hazards, lots of information for crafting and running paragon-tier adventures, and a paragon-tier city that you can drop into any D&D campaign.

2009: Year of D&D Insider

We start off the new year with *D&D Insider* up and running. *Dragon* Magazine, *Dungeon* Magazine, and the *D&D Compendium* have provided the core of the experience thus far, and we have great things in the works to make these components even more compelling in the year ahead. But it doesn't stop there. In very short order, the *D&D Character Builder* goes live, featuring 30-levels of material for every character class in the game. And just like the *D&D Compendium*, the *D&D Character Builder* gets updated in real time. As new products or magazine articles add to the rules set, these programs will keep up with the new content.

After that... well, we're working on that. We had grand plans and we were overly ambitious in what could actually be accomplished in the time we had. We don't want to overextend or overpromise anymore. We're going to finish the *D&D Character Builder*, then take stock of where we are and what we can and should concentrate on next. Things are in the works, and I look forward to the day when the whole grand plan comes together. But we'll be more realistic in our goals and timelines moving forward. I'll talk more about this in the weeks and months ahead, both here and in Digital Insider.

That said, I do promise that as a *D&D Insider* you'll get exclusive content for your D&D game. You'll get to play with new material before anyone else, in most cases months or even a year or more before the content is published. You'll hear about new products, new concepts, new campaign worlds before anyone else, because that's part of the benefit of being a *D&D Insider*. Stick around. It's going to be a great year.

2009: Year of Eberron

This is also the year that we bring the Eberron campaign setting into 4th Edition. This summer is all about Eberron, with the release of the *Eberron Campaign Guide*, *Eberron Player's Guide*, and the *Seekers of the Ashen Crown* adventure. As one of the co-creators of the original Eberron campaign setting, and as one of the key people behind selecting Eberron when we ran the campaign search a few years back, the world of pulp fantasy and adventure is very special to me. It's an exciting place, full of amazing new ways to look at a D&D campaign. By bringing the setting into 4th Edition, we're reinvesting in this world that's caught between the Last War and an uncertain future. If you haven't checked out Eberron, or if you've been away from Eberron for awhile, then this is the summer for you. And like every D&D setting, you can play it as is or you can borrow elements to add to whatever campaign you're playing in. Warforged and artificers can and should show up in any D&D game.

2009: The Year of D&D

Those are some of the big-ticket items associated with the brand for 2009, but they are by no means all that you'll find as the year rolls out. Next time, we'll look at some of the other D&D products coming out this year, as well as some D&D novels to watch for, and maybe even a few other surprises. I always keep a few of those around to spruce up every column.

As you think about the coming year, and whatever resolutions you might make, think about adding this one to the pile. Resolve to introduce a new player to D&D this year. You'll enrich that new player's life, and you might just make a new friend along the way.

Sneak Peek

The adventure *E1: Death's Reach* allows adventurers to get a glimpse of the terror and wonder that was the Dawn War—the battle for creation between the gods and the primordials. Along the way, the adventurers encounter a few of the most terrible weapons of war unleashed by both sides. Here's an example:

Astral Warwing

In the Dawn War, the gods created glorious constructs called astral warwings and other astral war engines to fill out their armies and counter the chaotic creations of the primordials. The warwings were used to break enemy formations and fortifications, and to bolster units of living soldiers. Modeled after the angels that were the first servants of the gods, the astral warwings are sometimes mistaken for members of the angelic host.

The warwings were used to break enemy formations and fortifications, and to bolster units of living soldiers.

Astral warwings all have a similar appearance, with modifications based on role and mission. The standard astral warwing is a mace-wielding soldier, while other warwings are designed as ranged artillery, brutal engines of destruction, elite command and control centers, and even solo battle wings designed to take on huge numbers of enemies all by themselves.

Astral warwings follow their orders to the letter. Without a recognized commander in the field, a warwing will continue to act on its last set of orders for as long as it is able.

In the current age, these astral warwings can still be encountered. Some are still used in divine dominions, and some have been captured and put to use in other planes. Still others, however, were lost among the planes and can show up in unexpected places.

Astral Warwing	**Level 23 Soldier**
Large immortal animate (construct)	XP 5,100
Initiative +20 **Senses** Perception +18	
HP 214; **Bloodied** 107	
Regeneration 10 (if the astral warwing takes necrotic damage, regeneration does not function until the end of its next turn)	
AC 39; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 35, **Will** 35	
Immune disease, poison, sleep	
Speed fly 8 (hover)	
Astral Mace (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning, Radiant, Weapon**	
Reach 2; +30 vs. AC; 2d12 + 6 lightning and radiant damage, and target is marked until the end of astral warwing's next turn.	
Mace Sweep (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Lightning, Radiant, Weapon**	
Close blast 2; +28 vs. AC; 2d12 + 6 lightning and radiant damage, and target is dazed until the end of astral warwing's next turn.	
Combat Vigilance	
If a target that the astral warwing has marked shifts or makes an attack that does not include the astral warwing, the astral warwing can make an *astral mace* attack as a free action against that target.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** telepathy 20
Str 25 (+18)	**Dex** Dex 24 (+18) **Wis** 24 (+18)
Con 22 (+17)	**Int** 8 (+10) **Cha** 8 (+10)

Astral Warwing Tactics

An astral warwing flies into battle, using its *astral mace* attack to take down enemies one at a time, or switching to its *mace sweep* when multiple targets are available and when the power has recharged. An astral warwing remains in the midst of a battle, using its ability to mark its enemies to contain and lock down its opponents for as long as possible.

Astral Warwing Bombardier	**Level 24 Artillery**
Large immortal animate (construct)	XP 6,050

Initiative +22 **Senses** Perception +19
HP 175; **Bloodied** 87
Regeneration 10 (if the astral warwing takes necrotic damage, regeneration does not function until the end of its next turn)
AC 36; **Fortitude** 36; **Reflex** 39; **Will** 36
Immune disease, poison, sleep
Speed fly 8 (hover)

Astral Ray (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Radiant**
Ranged sight; +29 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 10 fire and radiant damage.

Astral Burst (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Radiant**
Close burst 2; targets enemies; +27 vs. Fortitude; 3d4 + 10 fire and radiant damage, and the target is blinded (save ends) and pushed 3 squares. *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.

Astral Bombard (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Radiant**
Area burst 3 within sight; +27 vs. Reflex; 4d6 + 10 radiant damage.

Final Bombard (when reduced to 0 hit points) ✦ **Fire, Radiant**
Area burst 3 within sight; +27 vs. Fortitude; 3d8 + 10 fire and radiant damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** telepathy 20

Str 25 (+19)	**Dex** 30 (+22)	**Wis** 25 (+19)
Con 25 (+19)	**Int** 6 (+10)	**Cha** 6 (+10)

Astral Warwing Bombardier Tactics

An astral warwing bombardier flies over the battle, launching its area and ranged attacks. It uses *astral burst* to throw back melee attackers. When it knows destruction is inevitable, it moves into position for a *final bombard*.

Astral Warwing Rager	**Level 24 Brute**
Large immortal animate (construct)	XP 6,050

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +18
HP 275; **Bloodied** 137
Regeneration 10 (if the astral warwing takes necrotic damage, regeneration does not function until the end of its next turn)
AC 36; **Fortitude** 39; **Reflex** 36; **Will** 35
Immune disease, poison, sleep
Speed fly 8 (hover)

Siege Flail (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 3; +27 vs. AC; 2d12 + 10 damage, and the target is knocked prone. If the target is prone, the target is dazed until the end of the astral warwing's next turn.

Raging Assault (standard; at-will; warwing must be bloodied to use this power) ✦ **Weapon**
The astral warwing moves at half speed. It makes one *siege flail* attack with each square of movement against an enemy that comes within reach. It can make up to four attacks in this way. If it comes within reach of a conjuration or zone, it makes an attack: +25 vs. creator's Will. On a hit, the conjuration or zone is destroyed, and all its effects end. The creator takes 1d10 + 6 psychic damage and is pulled 2 squares closer to the astral warwing.

Raging Sweep (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires siege flail; close blast 3; +25 vs. AC; 2d12 + 10 damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares and knocked prone.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** telepathy 20

Str 30 (+22)	**Dex** 24 (+19)	**Wis** 22 (+18)
Con 25 (+19)	**Int** 6 (+10)	**Cha** 6 (+10)

Astral Warwing Rager Tactics

The astral warwing rager wades in to attack with its *siege flail*, crashing through enemy lines to outflank its opponents. It then pounds foes with *raging sweep*. True to its name, it becomes more deadly when it is bloodied, going on a rampage with its *raging assault* power.

Astral Warwing Commander	**Level 23 Elite Controller**
Huge immortal animate (construct)	XP 10,200

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +18
Commander's Boon aura 10; astral warwings that start their turn in the aura gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls.
HP 418; **Bloodied** 209
Regeneration 10 (if the astral warwing takes necrotic damage, regeneration does not function until the end of its next turn)
AC 37; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 34
Immune disease, poison, sleep
Saving Throws +2
Speed fly 8 (hover)
Action Points 1

Astral Blade (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 3; +28 vs. AC; 2d10 + 8 damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares.

Blade Sweep (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Close burst 3; +26 vs. AC; 2d10 + 8 damage, and target is pushed 3 squares.

Astral Target (minor 1/round; at-will)
Ranged sight; +27 vs. Reflex; the target is illuminated in astral fire, slowed, and takes an additional 1d10 + 8 damage from attacks made against it by astral warwings (save ends both).

Clearing Burst (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Area burst 2 within sight; +27 vs. Will; 2d8 + 7 psychic damage. In addition, this power targets any conjuration or zone in the burst; +27 vs. creator's Will; conjuration or zone is destroyed, all its effects end, and its creator is dazed (save ends).

Astral Thunder (standard; encounter) ✦ **Thunder, Radiant**
Close blast 5; targets enemies; +25 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 7 thunder and radiant damage, and the target is deafened and blinded (save ends both), and knocked prone. *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is deafened (save ends), but not blinded or knocked prone.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** telepathy 20

Str 27 (+19)	**Dex** 24 (+18)	**Wis** 24 (+18)
Con 23 (+17)	**Int** 12 (+12)	**Cha** 12 (+12)

Astral Warwing Commander Tactics

The astral warwing commander leads each battle with its *commander's boon* aura, then selects targets for other warwings with its *astral target* ability, which it uses each round to increase damage against its opponents. It uses either *blade sweep* or *clearing burst* each round, depending on how close its opponents are. It saves its *astral thunder* power for when it has multiple powerful enemies ganging up on it.

Astral Warwing Vanguard	**Level 23 Solo Brute**
Huge immortal animate (construct)	XP 25,500
Initiative +17 **Senses** Perception +17	
HP 1,052; **Bloodied** 526	
Regeneration 10 (if the astral warwing takes necrotic damage, regeneration does not function until the end of its next turn)	
AC 35; **Fortitude** 36, **Reflex** 35, **Will** 35	
Immune disease, poison, sleep	
Saving Throws +5	
Speed fly 6 (hover)	
Action Points 2	
⊕ **Astral Waraxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Reach 3; +26 vs. AC; 2d10 + 8 damage and the target is pushed 1 square. If the warwing is bloodied, the damage increases to 3d10 + 8.	
Double Attack (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
The astral warwing makes two *astral waraxe* attacks.	
↓ **Triple Attack** (standard; at-will; warwing must be bloodied to use this power) ✦ **Weapon**	
The astral warwing makes three *astral waraxe* attacks.	
↓ **Vanguard Vengeance** (immediate reaction when hit by an area or ranged attack; encounter; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Teleportation, Weapon**	
The astral warwing teleports up to 20 squares to end adjacent to the attacker and then make an *astral waxaxe* attack against the attacker.	
↓ **Vanguard Assault** (standard; at-will; warwing must be bloodied to use this power) ✦ **Weapon**	
The astral warwing moves its speed. It makes one *astral waraxe* attack with each square of movement against an enemy that comes within reach. It can make up to six attacks in this way.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** telepathy 20
Str 28 (+18) **Dex** 22 (+17) **Wis** 22 (+17)	
Con 23 (+17) **Int** 8 (+10) **Cha** 6 (+9)	

Astral Warwing Vanguard Tactics

The astral warwing vanguard is saved to send into the most dangerous battles, where it operates as an army unto itself, making multiple attacks each round.

In Case You Don't Know Him

Bill Slavicsek's gaming life was forever changed when he discovered Dungeons & Dragons in 1976. He became a gaming professional in 1986 when he was hired by West End Games as an editor. He quickly added developer, designer, and creative manager to his resume, and his work helped shape the *Paranoia*, *Ghostbusters*, *Star Wars*, and *Torg* roleplaying games. He even found some time during that period to do freelance work for D&D 1st Edition. In 1993, Bill joined the staff of TSR, Inc. as a designer/editor. He worked on a bunch of 2nd Edition material, including products for **Core** D&D, *Dark Sun*, *Ravenloft*, and *Planescape*. In 1997, he was part of the TSR crowd that moved to Seattle to join Wizards of the Coast, and in that year he was promoted to R&D Director for D&D. In that position, Bill oversaw the creation of both the 3rd Edition and 4th Edition of the D&D **Roleplaying Game**. He was one of the driving forces behind the *D&D Insider* project, and he continues to oversee and lead the creative strategy and effort for Dungeons & Dragons.

Bill's enormous list of credits includes *Alternity*, *d20 Modern*, *d20 Star Wars*, *Pokemon Jr.*, *Eberron Campaign Setting*, the *D&D For Dummies* books, and his monthly *Ampersand (&)* column for *Dragon* Magazine.